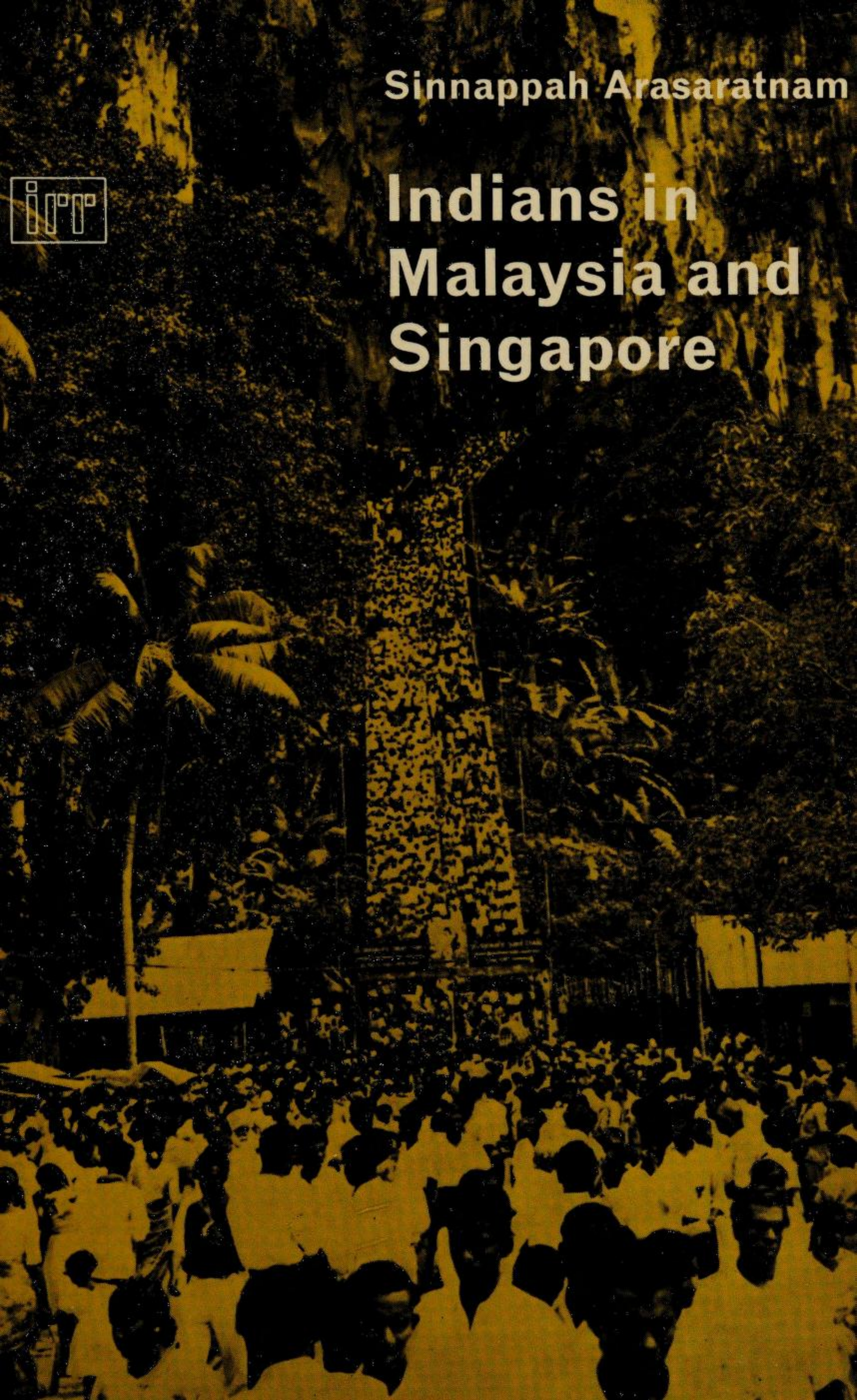
Sinnappah Arasaratnam

Indians in Malaysia and Singapore



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Preface and Acknowledgements

In writing this work I have been greatly assisted by the existing body of literature on different aspects of the Indian community. I have made full use of this present knowledge, particularly on immigration and labour questions. This material has been supplemented by some research into aspects that are as yet obscure. I am aware that I have only touched on the fringe of the subject, but I hope that I have at least indicated possible avenues for further specialized study, which must precede a more definitive work on the Indians in this country. This work is therefore offered in the belief that a tiny fraction of a loaf is better than no bread.

In the preparation of this work I have had the benefit of assistance from very many sources. Professor X. S. Thani Nayagam, head of the Department of Indian Studies at the University of Malaya, first suggested that I should undertake this work. Thereafter he has offered constant encouragement and provided every facility in the Department to carry on the work, for all of which I am deeply grateful. A number of Malaysian Indian friends have helped me in various ways. They have talked to me readily about their problems and shared their experiences. Some have lent rare books and given access to documents. I am very much indebted to all of them, and their number is too great to be recorded here individually. I hope I have used the information they have provided judiciously and with fairness.

Much of the work on the manuscript was completed while I held a Visiting Senior Fellowship at the School of

Oriental and African Studies, London, in the first half of 1968. I wish to thank the authorities of the School for this opportunity, and for the facilities I enjoyed in the Department of History of the School.

Department of Indian Studies
University of Malaya
September 1968

S. ARASARATNAM

Introduction

The absence of a single general work that presents a connected historical and analytical account of the Indian people of West Malaysia and Singapore has often been commented on by teachers and students of Malaysian affairs. This essay is a modest attempt to fill this need, and seeks to present a succinct account of the settlement and naturalization of Indians in Malaya (i.e. the Malay Peninsula and Singapore) from the middle of the preceding century.

In both the Federation of Malaysia and the Republic of Singapore, Indians today constitute the third largest ethnic group, next to the Malays and the Chinese. In both states they exist as a distinct and identifiable community, and will continue to do so for some time, in view of the historical circumstances that led to their settlement in these countries and the nature of their present social and political organization. In both states, society is plural in character, with little or no inter-action between individual communities in respect of social relations. In the Federation of Malaysia this tendency is strengthened by the entrenchment of communalism in the political system. In addition to their social and cultural separateness, the Indians have political status as a community, and will therefore continue to identify as Indians longer than in Singapore.

How this came about has been studied with particular attention to each distinct element of the population. Of the immigrant communities, the Chinese have been widely studied and written about. The story of the Indian entry is relatively less known, much less the nature, characteristics, and evolution of Indian society in these countries. Some

works have appeared dealing with Indian migration and settlement in more than one country of South-east Asia, or with Indian labour as part of the general problem of labour supply in Malaya. Significant contributions of this type are: V. M. Thompson and R. Adloff, *Minority Problems in South-east Asia* (Stanford, 1955), J. N. Parmer, *Colonial Labor Policy and Administration* (New York, 1960), U. Mahajani, *The Role of Indian Minorities in Burma and Malaya* (Bombay, 1960), and C. Gamba, *The National Union of Plantation Workers* (Singapore, 1962). Besides these works there are two doctoral dissertations, still in the process of publication, which concentrate on specific problems relating to Indian immigration and settlement.[1] While these works illuminate specific subjects, anyone attempting an overall study of the Malayan Indian community and attempting to present a picture of continuous development must necessarily do a great deal of spade work on his own, uncovering his facts from a wide variety of sources: governmental records, publications of societies and of educational and religious institutions, and the accumulated memory of the people.

Official records provide the most abundant and in some respects the only evidence of the process of Indian immigration and settlement. Annual reports of various departments of administration, reports of committees and commissions, proceedings of legislatures—these form the body of governmental records containing much material about the Indian community. At the Indian end there are the papers of the Controllers of Emigration and the authorities at the various ports of departure, reports of the Indian Agent in Malaya and of *ad hoc* commissions on emigration and the condition of emigrants, together with legislation and legislative proceedings relating to this subject which give a complete picture of the mechanics of emigration, and of

[1] Kernial Singh Sandhu, 'Indians in Malaya: Immigration and Settlement 1786–1957' (University of London, Ph.D. thesis, 1965). Forthcoming from Cambridge University Press.

Ravindra Kumar Jain, 'Migrants, Proletarians or Malayans? South Indians on the Plantation frontier in Malaya' (Australian National University, Ph.D. thesis, 1965).

Indian official and unofficial attitudes towards this phenomenon. Official records, both Malayan and Indian, relate largely to the labourer section of Indian immigrants, since the immigration of labour was systematic and assisted; it was promoted by the Government, which subsequently functioned as protector of immigrant labour. Next to official records, the most important sources for a study of immigrant labour are the records of the plantation companies which were the chief employers of such labour. In the Annual Reports of the Planters' Association, the journals they published, and the proceedings of their *ad hoc* committees, there is abundant material on the social and economic condition of Indian labour.

The records cited above contain little or no information on other groups of Indian immigrants: the professional middle class, commercial groups of all kinds, and innumerable categories of minor employees who flooded the cities from the 1930s. Though numerically a much smaller group, they were important in the transplantation of Indian culture and institutions in Malayan soil. The historian of Indians in Malaya cannot afford to ignore them, and indeed would be at a loss to understand socio-political developments without studying the influence exerted by these heterogenous groups. Fortunately, from the end of the nineteenth century, they began to leave traces of their emergence in the form of newspapers, periodicals, and other publications. Not all of these are extant today as the Second World War took its toll of private libraries in Malaya; unsettled conditions and rapid evacuations resulted in the destruction of many documents. Some of the periodicals and books of the early part of the twentieth century exist only in the British Museum. Newspapers, both Tamil and English, have provided a vital source of information up to contemporary times. The historian of the Indian community must also give due weight to tapping the memories of its older members. This is sometimes the only means of acquiring certain kinds of information relating to the years prior to and during the Japanese occupation of Malaya. It is also a useful technique for studying subsequent political

developments, provided it is used with care. The frequent changes of leadership among Indians after 1945 has called into existence a category of leaders *emeritus* who are always ready to talk of their role in the community's development.

The documentary sources listed above have provided the bulk of the evidence on which this book is based. It is essentially historical in its treatment of the subject and in its approach to the sources. It is an account of the process of settlement of the Indians in Malaya in chronological sequence, seeking to identify problems and issues in this process and the ways in which these were dealt with. An obvious chronological point of division is the end of the Second World War which separates the story into two parts: pre-1945 and post-1945. The work has also been limited by the documentary evidence which has been utilized. Official records are not always the most authentic or the most comprehensive sources of evidence. The labour population has not been able to produce its own written records. Thus, while much has been said on the policies, rules, and regulations relating to labour, little is known of its social organization and social life. The labourer's caste, which was recorded at the time of his departure to Malaya, ceases to feature in records thereafter, rendering it difficult to make any definite observations on the persistence of caste as a factor in social organization. This applies equally to family life, marriage customs, and religious practices, on which our evidence usually consists of vague generalizations.

In a sense the Indian community in Malaya is a heterogenous one. It has many linguistic sub-groups, and to do full justice to all of them one should describe each individually. Of all these groups the Tamils, by weight of numbers, have left a dominant mark on Indian culture in Malaya. They have always constituted over 80 per cent of the total Indian population domiciled in Malaya. This book therefore concentrates primarily on them, to the exclusion of other linguistic groups whose influence is negligible, and whose culture has not been able to implant itself in this country. The Malayalees and Thelugus, who form the next largest groups, are culturally closely allied to

the Tamils and have easily been able to identify with them in the pursuit of cultural objectives.

The term Malaysia used in the title is with deference to the territorial and nomenclature changes introduced in 1963, with the incorporation of the Borneo Territories and the island of Singapore into an enlarged Federation. Singapore seceded from the Federation in 1965 and became an independent state. Hence the title *Indians in Malaysia and Singapore* is used to describe correctly the two states as they are called at present. East Malaysian territories and even the eastern states of the Malay peninsula do not concern us in this book because the Indian element in their population is negligible. Much of the material and developments covered in the book relates to a period long prior to these recent events, when the land was known by other names and administered in different ways. The term Malaya has been used throughout in its geographical sense to describe the Malay peninsula and the island of Singapore. The states of Malaya are referred to individually when they have to be thus identified. When the whole political structure is meant, the specific constitutional form of a particular period has been used, viz. Straits Settlements (S.S.), Federated Malay States (F.M.S.), Malayan Union, and Federation of Malaya.

I | India and Malaya: Relationships before the Nineteenth Century

Viewed from a long-term historical perspective, the Indian migratory movement into Malaya in modern times could be described as the most recent phase of a continuous association between these two countries, situated on the two extremes of the Bay of Bengal. From the very early centuries of the Christian era, perhaps even earlier, the Bay of Bengal has been a highway of communication, bringing closer the economies and cultures of lands and people on its eastern and western ends. At all times, this contact has involved the exchange of goods, people, and ideas, though the proportion of each of these ingredients has varied in different historical periods.

Some basic differences exist between the contacts of the pre-modern eras and the new circumstances that have given rise to the movements of the modern period. In the last hundred years there was primarily an influx of people and subsidiarily an exchange of goods, while up to that time the movement of people was insignificant and that of goods and ideas was predominant. The pre-modern contacts were initiated by the Indians themselves, for their own benefit and in response to their own needs. In modern times, the movement of people was to serve the interests of a third party, and in response to demands caused by external factors. At all times, however, India derived considerable economic benefits from its contacts with Malaya. A drain of gold and specie from Malaya to India characterized the trade relations of pre-modern periods, and in recent times there were the periodic remittances sent back home by migrant Indians. The only difference was that in the former periods India supplied goods; in the latter, primarily labour.

The commerce between India and South-east Asia must be viewed in the context of the East–West trading systems which grew in volume from the early centuries of the present era. India and Malaya, two countries that lay athwart the sea routes connecting the two extreme ends of this trade, were bound to play a seminal role in this trade by virtue of their geographic position. They both became homes of entrepôts for the collection and distribution of goods originating in their respective regions. India was an obvious medium through which western goods could find their way to eastern markets, and where western merchants could more easily secure the produce of lands of the east. In a similar manner, the Malay peninsula became important as the land nearest to India across the Bay of Bengal, where the goods of South-east Asian and Chinese trade could be assembled and trans-shipped.

Apart from the entrepôt character of the trade between these two countries, there was the direct exchange of goods produced by them. The relatively advanced manufacturing industries of India found a good market in Malaya. From Malaya, Indian traders secured the much-desired gold, spices, other exotic local produce, and later, tin. This was a two-way trade, participated in by Indian merchants sailing to Malaysian ports and Malaysian merchants sailing to Indian ports.

A distance of about 1,200 miles separates ports on the eastern coast of India from west Malayan ports. The ship that left an east Indian port sailed due east to the Nicobar Islands, taking advantage of the north-east monsoon that breaks in October. From there, it headed for the relatively protected seas west of the island of Sumatra, and saw landfall on the Kedah coast. The Kedah peak, visible from far out at sea, would have been a navigational aid to the sailors. Alternatively, ships sailed northwards to the isthmus of Kra, where traders could cross the narrow peninsula by land. The homeward journey was assisted by the south-west monsoon beginning in May. The monsoons thus produced a rhythmic movement of ships between India and Malaya. The dependence on seasonal monsoons produced

the other characteristic of Indo-Malayan contact, settlement and colonization. It was necessary for some of these traders to establish settlements while they awaited the change of monsoon. Agents and employees of these merchants also stayed over to collect the produce from scattered regions, and assemble them in time for the ships' departure. As a logical sequel, the first signs of Indian settlement are to be seen in places which were used as entrepôts of trade.

The earliest evidence of Indian presence and influence in Malaya is found in the southern Kedah and Province Wellesley regions, in the form of fragmentary inscriptions in Indian script of the fourth and fifth centuries, and later of simple structures of Buddhist and Hindu character. The early inscriptions are clearly of Buddhist origin, taking the form of Buddhist prayers inscribed on stone, probably by Buddhist merchants who were travelling in these parts. The inscriptions are in Sanskrit, and the script is the Pallava Grantha script, showing that the traders were in all probability from southern India. South India was permeated in these years by Buddhist and Jain influence, with the city of Kanchipuram as the seat of important institutions of Buddhist learning. The commercial and artisan groups were generally of Buddhist and Jain persuasion, and must have featured prominently in the trade to South-east Asia. From the sixth century, it becomes evident from the abundant artefacts of an Indian character that the ports of the Kedah coast on the mouths of the Sungei Bujang, the Sungei Merbok, and the Kuala Muda were major ports of call for Indian traders. These river valleys appear to have become the seats of settlements of Indian traders, presumably waiting for the change of monsoon and using these places as centres for participation in the trade of neighbouring regions. Inevitably, the Indians left their cultural imprint in these places, and probably influenced the cultures of societies around them. Soon there sprang up along river valleys and on mountain tops—at Bukit Choras, Bukit Mertajam, Bukit Meriam, and the Kedah Peak—Saivite and Vaishnavite shrines with statues identical to those in the Pallava style of South India. The seventh century saw

the revival and spread of Saivism and Vaishnavism, resulting in the decline of Buddhism and Jainism all over southern India. This movement is reflected in the character of Indian influences evidenced in Malaya at the same time.

Considerable controversy exists as to the nature and chronology of the spread of Indian influence in the Malay Peninsula.[1] From Chinese sources we hear of the existence of an Indianized kingdom of Langkasuka in the eastern part of the Malay Peninsula dating from the second century A.D. This would make this state the earliest Indianized kingdom of South-east Asia, and would give rise to the speculation that Indian influence spread from there to other parts. The difficulty with such a hypothesis is that it does not appear to have led to the sustained accession of political power that would be warranted by such early Indianization. For apart from this Chinese tradition, recorded centuries later, there is no evidence of strong political power in the Malay Peninsula until the Kingdom of Sri Vijaya in the eighth century, and this was a maritime rather than a territorial power. This lends support to the prevailing view that the Malay peninsula did not witness Indianization on such an extensive scale as countries to the north and south. Indian merchant communities must have been self-contained entities, managing their own affairs and living their own lives, with the minimum of contact with indigenous societies. A view of such a community comes to us from a Tamil inscription in Takuapa, an emporium on the western coast of the isthmus of Kra in modern Thailand. Here a South Indian mercantile corporation, the *manikramam*, had established a settlement possessing its own regiment, had constructed its own temple and tank, and lived

[1] Of the volume of literature on Indian influence in the Malay Peninsula, the following may be recommended: H. G. Quaritch Wales, 'Archaeological Researches in Ancient Indian Colonisation', *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* (Vol. XVIII, no. 1, 1940), pp. 1–85; A. Lamb, 'Miscellaneous papers on early Hindu and Buddhist settlement in northern Malaya and South Thailand', *Federation Museums Journal* (Vol. VI, New Series, Kuala Lumpur, 1961); P. Wheatley, *The Golden Khersonese* (Kuala Lumpur, 1961), pp. 177–204.

as a self-contained colony.[2] Such would have been the pattern of Indian settlements in the other emporia of Malaya.

When the Kingdom of Sri Vijaya expanded into a powerful maritime empire by the ninth century A.D., controlling all major ports and outlets on both sides of the Straits of Malacca and along the eastern and western coasts of Malaya, Indian trading contacts appear to have changed their character. Now they called at the main ports, and dealt with well-established trading systems and traders of South-east Asia. Kedah, or *Kadaram* as it was called by the Tamils, continued to feature prominently in South Indian trade. Political relations were established with Sri Vijayan kings, and even with subordinate rulers in the Malay Peninsula. The great trading corporations of southern India appear to have had their stations in South-east Asia until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The Colas of South India had such intimate interests in this trade that they went to the trouble of undertaking an extended naval expedition against ports on the east and west coasts of Malaya in the eleventh century.[3]

Indian cultural influence spread into Malayan states and affected political and social institutions through the direct agency of the Indian traders and settlements, or from other Indianized centres in South-east Asia. The institution of kingship was perceptibly changed under this influence; tribal polities were raised in status to kingdoms, and the paraphernalia of court ritual and ceremony adopted. Hindu concepts of kingship and Hindu administrative institutions and ceremonial became so deeply embedded in Malayan courts that even after these states were Islamized many of these practices remained, some even to this day. Hindu and Buddhist ideas and forms of worship seem to have spread widely. Popular or folk Hinduism seems to have mingled especially well with the animism of tribal religion, and produced a pattern of beliefs which also

[2] K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, 'Takuapa and its Tamil inscription', *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* (Vol. XXII, no. 1, 1949), pp. 25–30.

[3] K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Colas* (Madras, 1955), pp. 209–20.

persists in some aspects to the modern day. The influence of the Sanskrit language and its literature appears to have been most marked. Though the language itself must have been known only to the Brahmins and probably to a few princes and nobles taught by them, the ideas embedded in its literature spread downwards into folk culture. Sanskrit language influenced the development of Malay, giving it many words and concepts. Its well-known literature, such as the Mahabharatha and the Ramayana, the stories of the Puranas and the Panchatantra, was diffused widely and entered Malay literature. The Ramayana was spread through the medium of the shadow theatre, the *wayang kulit*, and remains a part of traditional Malay culture. By this process of interaction, Indian and Malay culture impinged at many points, developing a great deal of similarity in values and external forms.[4]

With the decline of Hindu shipping and mercantile activity and the expansion of Islamic political and economic power in India, the number of Hindu traders coming to Malaya declined, giving place to the more powerful and better-equipped Muslim merchants of Bengal, Golconda, Coromandel, and Gujerat. Their growing predominance in the trade corresponds with the gradual Islamization of South-east Asia, a process to which they made their contribution. Indian Muslim merchants featured in the early politics of the Malacca Sultanate, and helped in its development and prosperity. There is clear evidence that Tamil Muslim families from the Coromandel coast occupied high positions in the court, inter-married with the royal family, and influenced political events.[5] Indian Muslims, and even some Hindus who still participated in the trade, held high administrative positions, especially in the port and customs. Indian trade with Malacca expanded enormously from the fifteenth century, and was a factor in the prosperity of this port. At the time of the Portuguese conquest of Malacca, Tomé Pires was able to talk of numerous Indian vessels

[4] For an account of Indian influence in Malay culture, see R. O. Winstedt, *The Malays: a Cultural History* (Singapore, 1947), pp. 18–33, 63–90, 139–52.

[5] R. O. Winstedt, *Malaya and Its History* (London, n.d.), pp. 34, 36–7.

calling at Malacca annually from various ports of India.[6] It was for them the great emporium for the goods of the China trade, and the place to dispose of Indian and Middle Eastern goods for all South-east Asian markets. Separate port officers or *shahbandars* managed the volume of Indian trade. The Portuguese and, later, Dutch occupation of Malacca, and their policy of monopolizing trade here tended to lessen Indian participation. Indian traders also called at other Malayan centres of trade, such as Kedah, Junk Ceylon, and Perak, for elephants, tin, and pepper.

The close commercial and political connexion with Malacca resulted in the founding of an Indian settlement there. A suburb of the city called Kampong Kling was occupied by Indians, who were employed as officials, teachers, petty traders, goldsmiths, and craftsmen. The Indian Muslims had their own mosque and were settled around it, the area being known as Kampong Palli (*palli* being the Tamil term for a mosque). This Indian element became a permanent part of Malacca's population under the Portuguese, the Dutch, and the English. The Hindus of the place came to be known as Malacca *Chetties*, not because all of them were from the *chetty* caste, but because they were primarily engaged in commercial occupations. The Hindus retained their religious traditions and forms of worship. In the eighteenth century the Dutch granted them a piece of land to build a temple. The Tamil Muslim element was strengthened by continuous immigration from the Coromandel coast and by inter-marriage with women from there. Tamil continued as a strong literary language among them, formal education being imparted in this language to their children. A classic example of the blending of Malay and Tamil Islamic traditions is found in the work of the eminent Malay writer, Munshi Abdullah, in the early nineteenth century. He belonged to a family of mixed Arab, Tamil, and Malay descent that had been settled in Malacca for three generations. He was educated in Arabic, Tamil, and

[6] *The Suma Orientalis of Tomé Pires*, transl. A. Cortesão, Vol. II (London, 1944), pp. 254–5.

Malay, and made significant contributions to Malay literature.[7]

Somewhat later than these Malacca settlements, other Indians were settling further to the north in Kedah, opposite the island of Penang. They were exclusively Muslims from the Coromandel coast, and were known as Chulias. These settlements appear to date from the beginning of the eighteenth century, when Malacca was closed to Muslim trade. With the founding of Penang by Francis Light, they moved to that island port in fair numbers. Early nineteenth century accounts of Penang and Province Wellesley record a substantial number of Chulias settled in the island as well as on the mainland, occupied as boatmen, pedlars, and farmers.[8] There were regular sailings from Penang to ports on the Coromandel coast such as Nagapatnam and Nagore, from where the Chulia Muslims came. They were temporary migrants, coming over to earn a living and returning after a few years with their savings. Some of them tended also to settle permanently and marry into Malay families. By the end of the nineteenth century, they were well on the way to absorption into the Malay community, constituting a separate group called Jawi Pekan. The tail end of this Chulia movement coincides with the early beginnings of the labour migration. Towards the end of the century this labour migration was to alter in its characteristics, intensify enormously, and usher in a new era of Indo-Malayan connexions.

Thus we note a historic continuity in the relations between these two countries from the early centuries of the Christian era to the present day. The contact is almost unbroken century after century but alters its nature to fit changing conditions in both countries. The movement of people and ideas before modern times may in a sense be said to have made the more intensive modern movement of people less

[7] Munshi Abdullah's well-known autobiographical work, 'Hikayat Abdullah', transl. A. H. Hill, *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* (Vol. XXVIII, part 3, 1955) pp. 34–58, contains interesting glimpses of the social life of Malacca's Indian Muslim community.

[8] T. J. Newbold, *Political and Statistical Account of the British Settlements in the Straits of Malacca*, Vol. i (London, 1839), p. 8.

painful. It may be argued that short-term migration and settlement in Malaya was already part of Indian history and tradition, and contributes an additional factor in explaining the ready and continuing migration in modern times. It certainly explains the ease with which the Indian settled down, since the country was not far different from his own. He had come into a society which in its institutions, its habits of daily life, and even its basic cultural values, was not totally alien to his own. Though for many years there was little or no contact with indigenous society, when contact was established it was found that a fruitful co-existence was possible between the two peoples. The Indian in Malaya, unlike the Indian in the West Indian Islands or the colonies of East and South Africa, did not feel himself so completely alienated from his environment or sc drastically separated from the indigenous people.

II | Indian Immigration and Settlement from 1800

The Machinery and Process of Immigration

From the early years of the nineteenth century, the tropical and sub-tropical colonies and dependencies of western European states saw new developments in agriculture. Cash crops were grown in a suitable physical environment as large-scale ventures, with the use of new and advanced techniques, and considerable investment of capital. It was a process which created fresh opportunities, problems, and demands in the countries that were thus opened up. Among the prime factors was the demand for manpower to cope with the extensive activities involved in these ventures. This manpower was not forthcoming from the areas where the operations were being conducted. These regions were either very sparsely populated, or were inhabited by people who were engaged in other parallel forms of economic activity, and would not be distracted from their traditional patterns of occupation to take advantage of the new opportunities. The only alternative was to look elsewhere, and to induce the migration of large numbers of people from areas which were well-populated but where the level of economic activity was so low that people at the bottom end of the economic scale wanted to migrate to new opportunities. Thus the primary factor in the labour migration of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was the economic opportunities available in the receiving country.

In many respects, India emerged as the obvious country from which such manpower could be profitably sought. She was a vast subcontinent, with a large population politically united under one government. No substantial economic expansion to absorb surplus labour was taking

place within her frontiers. On the contrary, in the early years of the nineteenth century, her traditional economy was breaking down, and the capacity of the land to support the people dependent on it was dwindling. It was not surprising, therefore, that in spite of the innate conservatism and immobility of the rural population, there were people in India to respond from the 1820s, the first years when the new opportunities appeared.

For the first three or four decades, such migration was periodic or seasonal, and haphazardly organized. The first movement, which was to the neighbouring island of Ceylon from about 1810 onwards, was organized by private agencies. This was soon followed by an exodus to other needy parts: Tenasserim after its conquest in 1826, Mauritius from 1836, and the West Indian Islands from 1838. At about the same time there was also a limited and irregular movement to the Straits Settlements for work in the sugar and coffee plantations as well as for domestic service.[1]

The machinery under which this movement of labour was initiated—and continued through the century—was the indenture system. Regulations would be imposed *ad hoc* by the Government of India as requests were made from various colonies for permission to recruit labour. There was no uniform system of control applied to all prospective recruiters of labour. Under the indenture system, a prospective employer of labour placed an order with a recruiting agent based in India for the supply of a stipulated number of labourers. The recruiting agent thereupon sent his subordinate contact-men into the villages, and picked the required number of men. These men, on signing a contract, were said to be under 'indenture' to the employer for a period of five years. This meant that they did not have the right to change their employer or their employment. At the end of this period they could be re-indentured for a further five years, or released from the indenture. Wages were fixed at the time of recruitment and were not subject to any change. Generally, a much larger number of men than

[1] For a description of the early migration movement see J. Geoghegan, *Emigration from India* (Calcutta, 1873), pp. 1–10.

women were liable to be recruited, because individual labour units rather than families were required. The charges for recruiting, and the expenses involved in the transport of the labourer, were borne by the employer, and the wages were calculated with due allowance for this initial expenditure.[2]

It was the indenture system that provided the first complement of Indian labourer settlers to the Malay Peninsula. For about thirty years the movement of labour to the Straits Settlements went on free of all controls. The Government of India Act of 1839 had banned all contracts with Indians for labour outside the territories of the East India Company, and all emigration for this purpose, except to places specifically authorized by the Government. But the fact that the Straits Settlements were under the East India Company, and were administered by the Indian Government at Calcutta, kept them out of the provisions of this Act. The only control over this migration was the regulation of native vessels in which the labourers were taken across the Bay of Bengal. In 1859, rules relating to the standardization of requirements in ocean-going vessels were extended to cover native craft plying the Bay of Bengal. This in turn put up the cost of passages and, therefore, of recruitment of labour. In 1864, because of reported abuses in recruitment and transport, the emigration of Indian labour to the Straits Settlements was implicitly prohibited by an Act of Parliament, but, as was the case with many Acts of this period relating to labour migration, this was not effectively applied.[3] However, some restrictions were put into effect in 1867, when the Settlements were freed from the control of the Indian Government. By now, the sugar planters of the Settlements wanted a steady and assured labour supply, and were prepared to 'purchase' all the indentured men brought over by the contractors. There were two channels of supply for indentured labour. In the first place there were two or three commercial firms, based in Nagapatnam and Madras, accepting orders from employers. Then there were the speculators, who recruited on

[2] C. Kondapi, *Indians Overseas* (New Delhi, 1951), pp. 8–29.
[3] Geoghegan, op. cit., pp. 63–4.

their own and shipped the men to Penang for their own profit. Recruitment continued to be illegal in terms of Indian law until 1872, when an amending Act was passed legalizing the movement of labour to the Straits Settlements. The term of an indentured contract was fixed at three years in 1876.

In 1877 some semblance of control was attempted over this growing phenomenon. After discussions between the Government of India and that of the Straits Settlements, it was decided to appoint an officer from each of the governments to manage affairs. The Madras Government appointed a Protector of Emigrants, and the S.S. Government an Emigration Agent stationed in Nagapatnam. Regulations were framed to establish and administer the emigration depots, supervise the methods of recruitment by a system of licensing recruiters, and stipulate the areas where recruitment was to take place. An additional precaution was that each recruit was to declare his willingness to emigrate before a magistrate.

It was clear from the outset that such a system, under whatever controls it operated, would be riddled with abuses. In many of the tropical colonies which were the recipients of such labour some humane persons spoke out loudly about its abuses. The British sub-collector of Tanjore, observing the operation of the recruiting system from Nagapatnam, the chief port of departure, called it 'a regularly organised system of kidnapping'.[4] The recruiters took no account of the physical condition of the recruits—what was important was to supply the number of labourers contracted for. Sometimes, and this happened in the case of speculators, questionable means were used to entice the labourers, who were in effect kidnapped to a distant country. Abuses relating to young women were tragic. A certain number were regularly recruited for prostitution in the new labour settlements. Then there was the journey by ship under inhuman conditions, resulting in a high mortality. A good number of the men who reached Malaya were unfit for any kind of work, let alone the arduous duties connected

[4] Cited in Geoghegan, op. cit., p. 63.

with plantation agriculture. Because of the nature of the contract, these labourers were worked extremely hard by their employers, who desired to get everything out of them during their period of indenture. Though the indenture was for three years, the employers had several means of getting them to work longer. By the addition of innumerable items of expenditure to the labourer's charge his indebtedness was perpetual, and he could not free himself from the indenture until he had settled his debts. Wages, agreed in advance when he was totally unaware of conditions in Malaya, were ridiculously low, much lower than the wages of other Indians who had migrated as free labourers.[5]

A large proportion of Indian labour coming into Malaya in this way was absorbed into the sugar plantations. Sugar was first a lucrative plantation crop in Province Wellesley, from where, after Britain's treaty with Perak in 1874, the planters moved into that state as well. Sugar cultivation expanded till the end of the century, when the rise of rubber put an end to its prospects. Of secondary importance was coffee, cultivated by Europeans on a plantation basis from the 1830s, and intensified in the 1880s and 1890s. This expansion began in the state of Negri Sembilan, and then spread to Selangor. In the first decade of the twentieth century coffee also had to give way before the phenomenal progress of rubber. From the second decade of the century there were also the labour requirements of governmental undertakings: public works, municipal services, and road and rail construction. For these, the Government recruited on its own directly from India.

The machinery that had appeared to serve the economic needs of a labour market in the relatively brutal decades of colonialism could not survive into the period when economic imperialism was being tempered with humanitarian reform. As noted above, liberal colonial administrators time and again spoke out against the indenture system as near-slavery. At home in India, the system came under attack with the rise of Indian nationalism. Nationalist opinion

[5] *Report of the Commissioners appointed to Enquire into the State of Labour in the Straits Settlements and Protected Native State, 1890* (Singapore, 1891).

seized upon any evidence furnished by colonial critics, and made effective propaganda in the legislatures of India. The indenture of Indian labourers for service abroad was held to be an affront to India, a disgrace to its citizens. There were also more compelling economic arguments against indenture as a form of labour supply. The type of migrant the system produced, and therefore the kind of labour made available, was unproductive. More important, coffee and rubber planters did not use the indenture system to obtain their labour; it was the sugar planters who in the main used this machinery. As the demands of the rubber industry grew, the rubber planters began to oppose the indenture system on the grounds that it was clogging up the flow of immigrant labour instead of assisting it. In any case, the sugar industry was declining. And the final blow to the indenture system, as far as Malaya was concerned, was given by the British Government in 1910, when in response to liberal pressures at home, it instructed the Straits Settlement and F.M.S. Governments to abolish the indentured recruitment of Indian labour.[6]

In the period when Malaya was primarily served by indentured labour (supplemented by some assisted non-indentured as well as by unassisted free labour) the Indian population that thus migrated was overwhelmingly South Indian. In the first place, the Indian Government had permitted such recruitment for Malaya only from the Madras State. Further, because of the mechanics of recruitment, the recruiters sought their men primarily from districts adjoining the authorized ports of departure—Nagapatnam and Madras. As Nagapatnam handled by far the greater portion of this traffic, the migrants were drawn from the adjoining districts of Tanjore, Madura, and Trichy. Those recruited by the Government for its own operations had a more mixed composition. While there were a large number of Madrasis among them, others were taken from the Punjab, Rajputana, Maharashtra, and Bengal. These included skilled workmen for the railways and able-bodied men for the police and security services.

[6] J. Norman Parmer, *Colonial Labor Policy and Administration* (New York, 1960), p. 50.

From the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a parallel system of labour recruitment was evolved for Malaya; though as yet it was secondary in importance. This was the method of recruiting through a *kangany*,[7] a person who was himself an immigrant working on the plantation as a foreman, or even as a labourer of some influence and standing. The employer would send him to India provided with money, to go to his village and district and recruit labourers among his own people. He was empowered to pay the passage and all other expenses connected with the migrants' departure. The advantage of this method over other methods of professional recruiting was that the *kangany* could be expected to exercise greater care in the choice of labourers. Furthermore, as the recruiting was done by a person known to the community, there would be a greater willingness to volunteer as emigrants. Thus indiscriminate recruiting, the danger of coercion, and other abuses inherent in the indenture system were done away with. Besides, there was now scope for the migration of families rather than individuals, a factor of great significance in the settlement process of the Indian community in Malaya.

When the *kangany* returned to Malaya with his group of labourers and delivered them to his employer, they were employed in that plantation, usually under the *kangany* who had recruited them. Thus there was a continuing connexion between the *kangany* who was originally responsible for their decision to migrate and the labourers in their new and strange environment. This considerably reduced the hardships resulting from migration as far as the labourer was concerned. He continued to depend on the *kangany* and looked on him as a source of security as well as a general adviser on all questions connected with his new employment and all problems relating to his settling down in his new country. This relationship was, further, of importance for the growth of leadership patterns within this community. The *kangany* received a commission for each of the labourers

[7] A Tamil word literally meaning overseer or supervisor; in Malaya and Ceylon it became a specific labour term for the foreman of a group of labourers working together on a plantation or construction.

he brought and kept in employment. The passage and other expenses incurred in bringing the labourer were treated as a loan which he had to settle within two years. Unlike the case of the indentured labourer, this was not a legally enforceable loan, and in theory the labourer was free to do what he liked when he set foot on Malayan soil. But in practice, he had to work out his loan for the employer who had brought him over, because no other employer would take him on. If another employer took on a labourer recruited by someone else, a practice called 'crimping', it was frowned upon by the employer fraternity, who soon banded together to take strong measures to prevent it. The *kangany* also had subtle means of keeping the labourer on a lead, attached to and dependent on him.

Coffee and rubber planters got most of their labour through *kanganys* because of the superior labour force thus provided. In Ceylon, the other colony where *kangany*-recruited labour was extensively used, the *kangany* was the agent through whom the estate management made any payment to the labourer. This was not so in Malaya, where wages were paid direct to the labourers. The Ceylon system would have brought further dependence of the labourer on the *kangany*, but nevertheless the Malayan *kangany* had an effective hold on his labourers, and for a long time provided them with whatever leadership they possessed. Not all *kanganys* were foremen, a good many of them being elderly labourers who had worked in the plantations for some time. They were generally of good caste and had preferably to be heads of large families and persons of influence among other and subordinate castes in the village. In brief, the *kangany* had to be a person who could command the respect of as wide a sector of the community of his village and district as possible. It was this system of recruiting that became the mainstay of labour supply after the indenture system was abolished in 1910 and until the end of assisted labour migration from India to Malaya in 1938.[8] It was of immense social significance in determining the nature of

[8] The *kangany* system of recruitment is described in Kondapi, op. cit., pp. 29–52, and Parmer, op. cit., pp. 21–3.

social life and settlement in the plantations for many years.

Some significant changes were introduced in the machinery of labour migration by joint consultations between the Malayan and Straits Settlements Governments and the United Planting Association of Malaya, representing the planting interests. The planters of Malaya had for some time been pressing on the Government the need to co-ordinate and regularize the provision of a balanced labour supply to suit the demands of the rapidly-growing rubber industry. The planters' view was that the Government should take the initiative in making available a continuous supply of labour. On representations by the planters in 1906, the Government decided to take some steps in this direction, and established an Indian Immigration Committee in 1907. It was a semi-official Committee consisting at the outset of three official and five unofficial members, four of whom were planters, and one a European businessman from Singapore. This Committee now assumed the task of importing labour centrally for the needs of various official and private undertakings in Malaya. Very soon, an Indian Immigration Fund was set up by the Committee to defray all the expenses related to the import of labourers. The fund was to be made up of a rate paid by all employers of Indian labour in proportion to the amount of such labour utilized by them. The Fund met a multitude of items of expenditure connected with labour migration: payment of recruiting allowances, cost of transport from India to Malaya, cost of repatriation to India, salaries of recruiting inspectors and inspectors on board steamers, maintenance of depots and camps in India and Malaya, and the maintenance of a home for old and decrepit labourers.

The Committee legalized and regularized *kangany* recruitment, and adopted it as the system most satisfactory for the growing demand for labour in Malaya. Now the *kangany*, having procured a licence from his employer to permit the recruitment of a certain number of labourers, had to get this licence endorsed by the Labour Department officials at Penang where his commission, wages stipulated for the labourers, and his own credentials were checked. The

kangany, according to the Committee's definition, had to be a South Indian of labouring class and should have been employed in the plantation to which he was recruiting for at least three months. His licence also had to be endorsed at the India end by the Malayan Emigration Agent at Madras or Nagapatnam. He received his cash advances from the financial agents of his employers at either of these places. On recruiting people in the village he had to have the prospective emigrants' names approved by the village *munsif*. When he had completed these formalities and assembled his men at the port of departure, he would leave with them for Malaya in a regular steamer contracted for this purpose by the Committee. When there was a brisk inward and outward traffic of labourers, the Committee kept a close control of all aspects of the immigration machinery, and made use of the *kanganys* to deliver the number of labourers required every year.

In spite of the services done to the Malayan labour market by *kangany* recruitment, the system soon became the target for the hostility of Indian nationalist opinion. The burden of criticism was that the *kangany* induced persons to migrate under false pretences, presenting Malaya to his gullible village audience as a land where money could be easily made, and life was leisurely and pleasant. They were not made aware of the realities—hard labour under difficult conditions in the plantations, and meagre wages from which savings were difficult. The lavish going-away party held on management money, with liquor flowing, added to the illusion. Critics also paid attention to the tie between labourer and *kangany*, which continued for a long time, and was held to be one of exploitation. Srinivasa Sastri, the Indian liberal leader sent to investigate Indian labour conditions in Malaya, called this the labourer's 'concealed obligation to the *kangany*, which will act to his disadvantage'.[9] He recommended the abolition of recruitment through *kanganys*.

It was again economic factors that caused the gradual

[9] V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, 'Report on the Conditions of Indian Labour in Malaya, 6 February, 1937', *Proceedings of the Federal Council* (1937), c.75–103.

decline of *kangany* recruitment. During the Great Depression of 1929–32, the demand for labour was so drastically reduced that there was no need for immigrant labour. So *kangany* recruitment was suspended. When economic conditions improved, the issue of *kangany* licences was limited, and such recruitment was but a fraction of its former volume. The system was finally abolished in 1938, with the ban on all assisted emigration by the Government of India.

There was also some voluntary emigration of unrecruited Indian labour. The Malayan authorities kept their doors open to such migrants. In the period before the Depression, their numbers were small. It was after the Depression that many such people turned up at the ports of embarkation wanting to migrate to Malaya. By then *kangany* recruitment had dwindled, and anyone who wished to migrate had to do so on his own initiative. The fact that from 20,000 to 30,000 people per year emigrated in this way during these years shows the extent to which migration had caught on among the destitute section of the labouring classes in particular areas.

Indian Official and Unofficial Attitudes to Emigration

In the nineteenth century, the widespread belief in the efficacy of a free and untramelled economy was shared by many policy-makers in the British Indian administration. By a process of legislation throughout that period, the path was cleared for the free movement of capital, goods, and services within and into India. It was believed likewise that there were no valid economic reasons against the outflow of labour to places where it was needed. All that was necessary was to build in certain safeguards to make this movement of labour conform to some civilized standards of health, amenities, and service conditions. This was the view of the Indian Law Commission, to which the question of emigration of Indian labour was referred in 1836.[10] Towards this end, laws were passed on an *ad hoc* basis,

[10] Geoghegan, op. cit., p. 3.

dealing with specific countries as problems arose. Once the Government was satisfied that these minimum safeguards were being adopted in the receiving country, it permitted that country's officials to recruit freely. It considered its attitude to the migration movement to be one of benevolent neutrality. The Government put this policy into operation with regard to Malaya. When the movement of labour into Malaya began to intensify, it exercised some restrictions through its own regulations. But once a good liaison was established with the Malayan Governments on the treatment of migrant labour, and once the Indian Government was satisfied with this treatment, it removed these restrictions gradually, until in 1897 all controls were lifted. The idea that this was a perfectly legitimate and even desirable economic transaction, involving a natural response to the labour market, was basic to the official Indian attitude. As the movement was within the British Empire it did not raise any problems of an international character.

As we move into the twentieth century, new factors and attitudes make their appearance, and begin to alter the whole situation. The most important of these was the growth of nationalist opinion. One of the issues with which Indian nationalists became concerned at an early stage was the recruitment and transport of Indian nationals to distant British colonies as labourers, or 'coolies', the derogatory term at that time. This was beginning to conflict with nationalist pride and offend nationalist sentiment. The Indian National Congress, and the Legislative Councils (after the introduction of the popular element in 1909) provided opportunities for the expression of strong nationalist views on this subject. From 1900, many resolutions were passed at the annual sessions of Congress condemning one aspect or another of labour migration.[11] It was no doubt the treatment of Indians in South Africa that attracted the widest attention and directed public opinion in India and Congress agitation towards the general problem of Indians overseas. From 1893, a series of discriminatory immigration,

[11] See Congress resolutions on Indians overseas in N. V. Rajkumar, *Indians outside India* (New Delhi, 1951).

franchise, and registration laws passed in the South African colonial legislatures served to spotlight Indian attention on the treatment of their countrymen in the colonies to which they had emigrated. This was also the occasion for novel methods of agitation and resistance introduced by M. K. Gandhi. Gandhi's movement of passive resistance to discriminatory laws in turn aroused Congress and inflamed Indian opinion. Nationalist politicians and Liberal members of the Legislative Councils kept themselves informed of all aspects of labour recruitment to colonies and the treatment labourers were accorded there. The Government had to take account of these sentiments in fashioning its emigration policy.

The movement of social and economic thought also caused a change in the Government's neutral attitude to the emigration of labour. The universal validity of *laissez-faire* and pure economic liberalism were being questioned from the end of the nineteenth century. The social implications of economic freedom were now coming to the fore. The protection of unequal groups in the interplay of economic forces was more readily undertaken. This was seen in the legislative programme of the Indian Government in the twentieth century. The movement of labour, especially from a country such as India, was not just an economic movement, but included a host of social and psychological problems affecting the immigrants. Given the Indian attachment to and dependence on the family, his deep respect for tradition and custom, and the relative absence of social change in South India in the immediate past, it is not difficult to visualize the enormity of the adjustment he was now forced to make, and the hardships attendant on this adjustment. The British Government, responsive to new ideas, was troubled by the whole problem on conscientious grounds.

Official policy now began to respond to nationalist opinion, giving rise to many combined efforts by British officials and responsible Indian liberal leaders to solve various aspects of the problem of Indian emigration. In 1916, Pundit Malaviya, a prominent nationalist member of

the Central Legislative Council, moved a motion urging the abolition of the indenture system. The Government accepted this motion, and the indenture system was abolished as a means of contracting emigrant labour from India.[12]

In 1922 a very important piece of legislation, the Indian Emigration Act, was passed to deal with other forms of assisted migration. At the same time a Standing Emigration Committee, consisting of Indian members from both houses of the legislature, was formed to advise the Government on matters relating to emigration. The Act brought into existence machinery to control emigration and protect Indian emigrants abroad. It made a Malayan Emigration Commissioner responsible for every recruitment carried out for Malaya. Every recruiting agent had to get permission to recruit from the local government of the port from which the emigrant would embark. He also had to secure the sanction of the village headman for every recruit. The Act attempted to regulate the proportion of male and female emigrants by laying down that the number of male emigrants unmarried or unaccompanied by their wives must not exceed one in every five persons over 18 years, in any one year. Finally, and perhaps the most significant of all, an Agent of the Government of India was to be appointed in Malaya to look after the welfare of Indians there. Quite strong though many of these provisions were, not all of them were equally effective. This was particularly so with regard to the provision controlling the sex ratio among emigrants. The other controls, too, were difficult to operate without a large administrative staff.

Indian members of the Standing Emigration Committee kept a close watch on emigration policy. Appeals by clients for Indian labour had to be made to them, and Malayan planters and Governments went to them on deputations more than once. Nationalist opinion continued to criticize the movement of labour and highlighted its various abuses. After the Government of India Act of 1935, the Indian Government was even more responsive to public opinion.

[12] 'Emigrant', 'Indian Emigration', *India of Today*, Vol. V (London, 1924), p. 26.

In 1936, a distinguished Liberal leader in the Central Legislative Council, Mr. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, was chosen to inquire into the condition of Indian labour in Malaya. It was finally the weight of Indian opinion that made the Government impose a total ban in 1938 on all forms of assisted emigration of labour to Malaya. Malayan Governments and planters tried many times to get this ban rescinded, but they were not successful.

The presence of an Agent of the Government of India in Malaya to look after the welfare of Indian immigrants was one profitable outcome of the 1922 Act. This Indian officer was stationed in Kuala Lumpur, with the right to visit and inspect plantations and other places where Indian labour was employed, as well as immigration depots and camps. He sent annual reports containing details of conditions under which these people lived and worked. These reports were as much directed at officialdom in India, as at Indian public opinion. They served to transform the nature of the Indian emigrant problem. It changed from one of exclusive concern with the mechanics and procedures of emigration and recruitment, to a concern for the living and working conditions, and the welfare and prospects of the large numbers of Indians who had come to live in Malaya. The Indian Government now began to look closely into the wages, cost of living, and housing and health facilities experienced by their nationals in Malaya. On the representations of the Indian Government, a standard wage was enforced in 1924. During the Depression these rates had to be drastically cut. But when the worst of the Depression was over, and the demand for Malayan labour was resumed, the Indian Government put forward a series of conditions on behalf of labour. They not only requested the resumption of pre-Depression wages, but asked for the institution of a basic monthly wage for each labourer. This was rejected by the planting interests, though they reluctantly conceded the standard pre-Depression rates in 1937. An attempt the following year to cut wages again was the immediate cause of the imposition of the total ban on labour emigration to Malaya in 1938. In all these crises, the Indian Agent was a key

figure, providing vital information for New Delhi on economic and political conditions in Malaya in so far as they affected Indian labour.

In any consideration of Indian attitudes to emigration, it is vital to look at the question from the standpoint of the emigrant, and inquire into the reasons why there was such an effective response from the Madras state, especially its Tamil districts, to the demand for labour in Malaya. It should be noted that this happened in spite of the intrinsic immobility and absence of serious economic motivation that the Tamil shared with so many of his countrymen at that time. It must be admitted at the outset that the basic reason why Tamil Nad supplied Malaya's labour needs was because Madras was the state where Malayan recruiters were permitted to recruit. The two ports of departure to Malaya, Nagapatnam and Madras, were in this state. Under other conditions and for other colonies, where labour took off from northern ports, such as Calcutta, Vizagapatnam, or Bombay, the composition was different. This accounts for the fact that almost 90 per cent of this labour traffic to Malaya has been of Tamil-speaking people. At certain times, the Thelugu districts to the north of Madras and, more occasionally, the Malayalam districts of Malabar provided the rest of the emigrants. There was a more marked preference among Thelugus to move as family units than there was among Tamils or Malayalees. In the Tamil areas, the following districts provided the emigrants: North Arcot, South Arcot, Salem, Chingleput, Tanjore, Trichy, and Ramnad. The first four are northerly districts in the hinterland of Madras and the other three are in the south, using Nagapatnam as their port. At some periods the northerly districts provided more of the emigrants; at other times the southern districts were predominant.

It is difficult to relate local economic conditions to the migration movement, and determine to what extent conditions in India were responsible for the large movement of population. Kingsley Davis, writing on the demography of the Indian subcontinent, expresses the opinion that the migrations were primarily the result of economic

opportunities abroad, and that local economic conditions had no effect at all.[13] In the absence of definitive regional studies of the agrarian structure of the relevant areas, it is difficult to confirm or dispute this conclusion. During the nineteenth century, it appears that there was no great pressure to emigrate resulting from developments in South Indian agriculture. This view is tentatively expressed in a recent study of agriculture in South India in that period.[14] In fact, in certain districts there was such a dearth of agricultural labour that District Collectors were concerned about the likely effects of emigration from their district on agricultural operations. It seems probable that as many of these emigrants came from the agricultural service castes, landlessness may have been a basic background factor behind their decision to emigrate.

In the twentieth century we have more information on the social composition of the migrants. The Census of 1931 for the Madras State reports that over a third of the emigrants belonged to the untouchable castes of *paraiyan*, *chakkiliyan*, *pallan*, and a conglomerate depressed caste called *adhi-dravida*. The others consisted of *vellalan*, *koundan*, *ambalakaran*, *kallan*, and *vanniyan*.[15] Presumably, almost all the emigrants of the untouchable castes would have been landless labourers or serfs in differing degrees of servitude, and it is not surprising that they should have migrated in such numbers. But it is of interest that other agriculturalists from the higher castes, many of whom would have been land-owning cultivators, chose to migrate. Particularly this is so with regard to the *vellalan*, *koundan*, and *vanniyan*, who ranked in the high-to-medium scale in the caste hierarchy.

The Census Report of 1931, while not saying that conditions in agriculture were responsible for these migrations, does state that this movement helped to take the pressure off the land in some areas. It says that in districts like Trichy and the Kaveri delta, and (to a less extent) in the

[13] Kingsley Davis, *The Population of India and Pakistan* (Princeton, 1951), p. 99.

[14] Dharma Kumar, *Land and Caste in South India* (Cambridge, 1965), pp. 128–43.

[15] *Census of India, 1931*, Vol. XIV, 'Madras', Part I (Madras, 1932), pp. 87–8.

Arcots, the land was in danger of reaching saturation point. It also shows, from the cumulative figures of migration from these affected districts, that emigration had become a habit.[16] One can also see the effect of immediate events such as a famine, flood, or cyclone. Such an occurrence, if regional, would put up the numbers migrating from affected areas. It also appears that migration to Malaya (and to Ceylon) was resorted to as a temporary measure to supplement the family income. Generally, the emigrant was able to return after three to five years with some cash savings, with which he bought a plot of land. So, as the period advances, both the composition of the emigrants and their provenance show a closer relationship between the pressure on land and the migration movement. Davis himself admits that the 'pressure to migrate, in the economic sense, has always been great enough to provide a stream of immigrants'.[17]

The magnitude of the migration also left its impact socially. The returning immigrant brought new habits of life and new values. He was more self-reliant, and possessed more self-respect. The large proportion of untouchable castes also had a salutary effect on the operation of the caste system. They generally benefited from this change, and when they came back did not submit to gross forms of discrimination against them. One must observe, however, that the changes were felt in muffled form. The emigrant was not cutting off his ties with his village; on the contrary, he was convinced that his stay in Malaya was temporary, and that he would come back and resume his place in village society. At the same time, caste taboos could not be strictly adhered to in that distant land, and their practice therefore became less rigid.

The Growth and Content of the Indian Population of Malaya to 1947[18]

Before the voluminous immigration of labour in the 1880s, the foundations of Indian settlements were laid in

[16] Ibid., p. 92. [17] Davis, op. cit., p. 99.

[18] Population statistics in this section are drawn from the following reports: J. R. Innes, *Report on the Census of the Straits Settlements taken on the 1st March 1901*

the three British settlements of Penang, Malacca, and Singapore by the wide variety of people who had established permanent domicile there by the middle of the nineteenth century. The legacy of the pre-British periods has already been noted. After the British settlements were established, there was a trickle of Indians into all three places. To Penang and Province Wellesley came people to work in the harbour, and in sugar, pepper, and gambier plantations. Then there were sepoys, lascarines, and domestic servants brought by the British and stationed in all three settlements. This population received some unwanted additions with the decision to use these settlements as a dumping-ground for convicts from India. From the early years of the nineteenth century, Penang, Malacca, and Singapore received these convicts, who their Governments put to work on various projects involving hard labour. This was stopped in 1860 only on the strongest protests of the growing and influential Straits Settlements business community. Through these diverse methods of migration, by 1870 the Indian population of Malaya had increased to over 30,000, the majority of them living in Penang and Province Wellesley. This figure does not include those who had migrated to the north-western Malay states over the past century, and had been assimilated into the Malay community through inter-marriage. These settlements had taken place in Kedah, Perak, and Johore and their numbers could not be ascertained.

With the extension of British control over west Malayan states from the 1870s, and the expansion of commercial agriculture from that time, the Indian population both of the Straits Settlements and of the protected Malay States grew rapidly. By 1891 it stood at over 75,000, and by 1901 it had grown to around 120,000. This was the direct outcome of assisted labour migration both for agricultural and government employment. The geographical distribution of

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(Singapore, 1901); A. M. Pountney, *The Census of the Federated Malay States, 1911* (London, 1911); J. E. Nathan, *The Census of British Malaya, 1921* (London, 1922); C. A. Vlieland, *British Malaya: A Report on the 1931 Census* (London, 1932); M. V. del Tufo, *Malaya: A Report on the 1947 Census of Population* (London, 1949).

this population follows the dictates of employment factors. Singapore and Penang record steady increases, for the expanded port operations as well as the municipal and public services. It is in the states of Perak and Selangor that fantastic increases are recorded. Negri Sembilan, at the turn of the century, shows the portents for the future increase of its Indian intake. These three states were the heart of the developing plantation agriculture. The Census of 1901 pointed to the direction which the dispersal of the Indian population of Malaya was to take in the course of the century.

The growth and distribution of the Indian population after 1901 is closely tied to the growth of rubber and, later, oil palm plantations. The acreage under rubber increased from about 50,000 in 1900 to 543,000 in 1911, and in 1938 it stood at 3,272,000 acres, making Malaya by far the world's largest producer of natural rubber. Correspondingly, in 1911 the Indian population had increased to about 270,000, in 1921 to 470,000, and in 1931 to 625,000.

The First World War (1914–18) affected the growth of the Indian population. Expansion in rubber was temporarily halted because of a shortage of capital. Immigration was prohibited in 1914 because of the shortage of work. Though it was resumed in 1915, numbers were kept down by restrictions imposed by the Indian Government. Besides, hardships undergone for the duration of the war affected the Indian community, malnutrition and epidemics causing a high death-rate among them. In spite of this, on account of a heavy immigration, the proportionate increase in the Indian population in the inter-censal period 1911–21 was much higher than that of Malaya's other two communities, the Chinese and Malay. This increase ensured a permanent and stable core of Indian settlers in Malaya. It was in these years that the foundation for the naturalization and permanency of Indian settlement was laid.

The subsequent years fed this core of Indian settlement, and vastly enhanced its numbers. After the resumption of normal trade, the expansion of Malayan rubber began where it had left off, and continued till 1928. These years also saw some of the highest annual inflows of Indian labour into

Malaya. All this came to an end when the rubber industry showed signs of the ill-effects of overproduction. The international scheme restricting the production of rubber affected Malaya's expansion. Soon after this came the Great Depression, which was the heaviest blow to Indian immigration. Immigration virtually ceased in 1930–3. There were very heavy repatriations in these years, amounting to over 70,000 to 80,000 per year. The Census of 1931, which does not yet record the full ill-effects of the Depression, shows an increase of about 32 per cent in the strength of the Indian population over 1921. Though a heavy increase, it is less than half the increase of the previous decade, and reflects the disturbances caused by war, economic recession, and restriction schemes. The high net outflow during the Depression considerably reduced the Indian population resident in Malaya. When trade picked up again in 1934 and the Malayan rubber industry was on its feet once more, immigration was resumed to make good the reduction in the Indian work force. This went on until the Indian ban on emigration in 1938.

The Second World War and the Japanese occupation of Malaya followed soon after. Their effects on the Indian population, discussed in detail in a later section, were equally profound and tragic. The disruption of the sole means of sustenance of the labouring groups, the denial of various social amenities they had enjoyed in the estates, and the general food shortage in the country, had long-term effects on the health and fertility rate of the Indians. As a community solely dependent on the monthly wage packet, they were worst affected when this source was disturbed, as well as by the rising price of essential foodstuffs. Then there were Japanese military projects in remote and jungle-infested parts of the country as well as in the brutal terrain north of Malaya, in Thailand and Burma, to which Indian labourers were taken and put to hard labour. The most notorious of these was the Siam Railway project, aptly termed the 'death railway', because of its heavy toll of workers mobilized for this project. An estimate puts the number of Indian lives lost at over 60,000.[19]

[19] C. Gamba, *The National Union of Plantation Workers* (Singapore, 1962), p. 13.

In the Census taken soon after the war in 1947, the cumulative result of these factors is seen. The Indian population for the first time showed an absolute decline from the previous census. A population that had stood at 620,000 in 1931 dropped to 599,000 in 1947. The most important factor that explains this decline is the ban on labour emigration imposed by the Government of India in 1938. This meant that while those who had fulfilled their tour of duty in Malaya, and desired to repatriate with their savings did so, there were none coming in to level up the numbers and keep the labour population steady, as in previous years. Then there was the hurried repatriation in the panic-filled years of 1940 and 1941, with the threat and the advance of Japanese forces. The outflow in these years included both plantation labourers and others, such as domestic and shop workers, shopkeepers and pedlars, merchants of standing, and many members of the professional middle class. Natural increase may be expected to have made up for the losses sustained in this way, but while there was a fair amount of natural increase, some of the factors noted above, operative both during the Depression and in the period of the war, cancelled it out. Malnutrition and debility, caused by poverty and unemployment, the forcible mobilization of males for work in unhealthy and distant places, the breakdown in medical services—all these operated against an increase in population. The sum of all these was the absolute decline in numbers registered in 1947.

In retrospect, one may speculate that the 1938 ban by the Government of India had a powerful effect on the demographic strength and prospects of the Indian community in Malaya. It tended to limit the numerical strength of the community, and to reverse the trend of the past few decades, which had been towards a steady increase year by year of the numbers domiciled in that country. Had the Government of India given heed to the pressures of the Malayan Government, and the requests of the planting industry before and after the war, the effect would have been to expand the Indian population beyond its present figure, and make it a

numerically more powerful minority in Malaya. As it happened, the Indian population was frozen at about a tenth of the total population of Malaya. Thereafter, the increase registered by the Indian population through natural factors was comparable to that of the other major communities in the country.

As seen above, the early immigrant labour, coming through the indenture system, was predominantly male in its composition. The kind of work available, the living conditions, and the attitudes of the time, were not conducive to the migration of females in any large number. This is reflected in the 1891 Census, when there were eighteen females per 1,000 Indian males. A more enlightened attitude towards this problem combined with economic factors to bring about a change in this position. Work in the rubber plantations was such that it was advantageous to have a settled labour force. Women and children could be given lighter forms of work. Then there was the attitude of the Government of India, which from 1920 gave serious attention to the sex imbalance among emigrants. Though Malaya was repeatedly exempted from the sex ratio enforced by the Act of 1922, statistics show that conditions were improving. *Kangany* recruitment was tending to bring in families. The resulting increase in the female population is seen in every census in the twentieth century. For every 1,000 males, the number of females was 171 in 1901, 308 in 1911, 406 in 1921, 482 in 1931, and 637 in 1947. In the most recent Census (1957) there were 692 females to every 1,000 males. These figures speak for a fundamental change in the nature of Indian society, and in its attitude towards the country of employment. From the 1930s, the Indian population increased not only by immigration but also by reproduction. Indeed, after 1938 this was its only means of augmenting itself. This adds to the number of Indians born in this country, a factor vital to their naturalization. The proportion of Indians born in the country continued to increase in the following manner: 12 per cent in 1911, 12·4 per cent in 1921, 21·1 per cent in 1931, and 49·8 per cent in 1947.

A great deal has been said so far about the labour element in the Indian population. Though labourers were by far the most numerous immigrants before the war, there were also significant numbers engaged in commercial pursuits, and in professional and clerical employment. The migration of educated Indians, unlike that of labourers, was not recorded, and cannot therefore be measured statistically. The first immigrants to come in to man the clerical services in the growing bureaucracy were the Ceylon Tamils. This was largely the result of personal factors, depending on the British officers who were responsible for their recruitment. Those who came to Malaya after a tour of duty in Ceylon preferred to recruit Ceylonese clerks who had worked for them, or were recommended by those known to the officer in Ceylon. The superior network of secondary schools established in north Ceylon by the missionary organizations threw up a band of young men most suitable for subordinate clerical employment. Those who graduated from these schools had a good command of English, and were excellent in mathematics and accounts, as well as endowed with some general knowledge and understanding, and were seen as useful subordinates in Government departments. The fact that both Ceylon and Malaya were administered by the Colonial Office further eased matters. Once a batch of these people had come in the 1890s and made successful careers, kinship ties and intimate connexions with their villages of origin did the rest, and there came in the twentieth century a steady stream of such middle-class migrants. Though the total numbers were small—there were but 23,000 in 1947—their concentration in certain fields of service such as Railways, Postal Services, Accounts Divisions, and the Treasury made their presence felt, and later resented, by newer entrants.[20]

Soon after, educated young men from India became aware of these opportunities. Malayalees from the native states of Travancore and Cochin, and from the Malabar districts of the Madras state were among the first to come in large

[20] V. Coomaraswamy, *Report of the General and Economic Conditions of the Ceylonese in Malaya* (Ceylon Sessional Paper IX, 1946).

numbers. Similar to the well-organized schools system of Jaffna in Ceylon, there were extensive higher education facilities in the princely states of Travancore and Cochin, producing the most literate linguistic group in India. From the 1920s, Malayalee-educated men emigrated to Malaya, tending to concentrate in the private sector, in the lower grades of clerical employment in European firms and the plantations. Among them family ties also operated strongly in recruitment—once one man got a foot in the door he soon brought many others through it. One is able to see some covert hostility, quite naturally, between these two groups of middle-class immigrants, particularly in the plantation sector, where both before and after the war they competed for employment and promotion.

From the early years of the twentieth century, Indian Tamils started coming in as educated immigrants. As the opportunities for clerical employment were many and varied, they were also quite successful. And, as in the case of the Ceylon Tamils and Malayalees, early success encouraged more immigrants. They were employed in many Government departments and private firms. Some professionally-qualified people also immigrated—doctors, lawyers, journalists, and teachers—university-educated men coming with high expectations. They settled at first in the Straits Settlements, and then spread into the Federated States of Selangor, Perak, and Negri Sembilan.

Just at the time when more people in this category were anxious to come into Malaya to earn a living, the opportunities in that country began to dwindle. In India, higher education had now expanded beyond all capacity to ensure gainful employment for the educated. Unemployment among the university-educated was already prevalent in certain parts of the State of Madras, as well as in Travancore and Cochin. These graduates now came into Malaya in search of any form of employment, sometimes far below the level to which their education would entitle them. Leaders of the Indian community in Malaya felt this to be an affront to Indian dignity. With the Depression, clerical posts were severely cut down and there was considerable

retrenchment. In 1934 the Agent of the Government of India issued a warning through the press in India against educated Indians coming to Malaya in search of jobs.[21] At all times, such migration was frowned upon by the F.M.S. Government but treated as a necessary evil because it performed a useful function in helping to man the clerical services. The migration of a professional elite was positively discouraged, though no steps were taken to ban it for fear of the reaction of the Government of India and Indian opinion.

Another element in the migration of non-labouring groups were the Sikhs, and other Punjabis and North Indians, who were recruited to the Police, Security Services in various Government departments, and as technical personnel on the Railways. This migration was also in the beginning influenced by personal factors. British officers who had served in the Punjab and United Provinces desired to have the services of these men in Malaya as well. So when the initial movement started, other members of the community were attracted to the place, and gravitated towards these sectors of employment.

In the same period, the migration of various categories of traders added to the Indian population. They were the lineal successors of the traders and sea captains of historic times. They now ranged from the large-scale entrepreneurs to the smallest pedlars. The enterprises that attracted migrant commercialists were of various types. The phenomenal growth of Singapore in this century, and to a lesser degree, of Penang, brought in North Indian businessmen from established business communities such as the Parsees, Sindhis, Marwaris, and Gujeratis *banyas*. Singapore was the centre of growth of Indian commerce. These people established themselves as both wholesalers and retailers of the India–Malaya trade. By the beginning of the war (1940) they were a well-established community in Singapore, with an influential North Indian Chamber of Commerce, and the recognized leaders of Indian society. There were also South Indian Muslims, famed for retail trade in India.

[21] M. N. Nair, *Indians in Malaya* (Koduvayur, 1937), p. 106.

Some of these families would have participated in South-east Asian trade for centuries. They moved into the retail trade in all kinds of goods of Indian origin. They took full advantage of the mass migration of Indian labour, and sought to provide goods and services that would be lacking in their new surroundings. There was also the growing urban community to be served. They were among the first to move into the Malay states, where because of their Islamic identification, they could gain admittance into the Malay *kampong* and establish business there. They came from the southern districts of Tamil Nad, primarily Tanjore and Ramnad, where the traders of the earlier period had also originated. There were some Malabar Muslims or Moplahs among them, a community traditionally engaged in trade and enterprise. The Moplahs too were engaged in the retail trade in Indian provisions.

Among Indian commercial groups were the Chettyar, a Tamil caste of businessmen and financiers, with a long historic tradition in such activities. Chettyar must have moved into the Straits Settlements by the middle of the nineteenth century, through agencies if not through the main Chettyar houses. The subgroup of the Chettyar caste important in migration to Malaya is the Nattukottai Chettyar. They are said to be the most distinct of the Chettyar groups, and in modern times the most prosperous. Their business enterprise now consists predominantly of money-lending. In India they live in a few villages in the Ramnad district in the south of the Madras state. They were the most enterprising of all trading castes of southern India. They were the most mobile: from their village base they would willingly go out to any part of the world to further their business, always returning to the ancestral village. In a traditional Chettyar home, right down to the early decades of the twentieth century, all sons live with the father even after marriage, but had to manage their own families separately. Sons at a young age were sent as agents of a relative to some distant place, overseas if necessary, with a certain sum of money. This was generally for a three year period during which he received a salary as well

as a percentage of the profits. At the end of the three year term some other relative was sent to take over from him, and he returned home to render account to his employer.[22] The Chettyar were generally reputed to be honest and trustworthy businessmen, though they would drive a hard bargain, and would not let sentimental considerations enter into the transaction of business. In Malaya they seem to have flourished because of the expanding economy and the need for credit. By the end of the nineteenth century they had extended their operations to the Malay states. Here they appear to have provided credit to sultans, nobles, and Malay peasants. From their transactions with the Malay peasantry, some problems arose which were solved by legislation in the 1930s. They lent money with or without security. The interest rate for money lent with security was much less than for loans without security. Generally, land or gold was accepted as security. By the 1930s they were well settled in all the major cities and towns and were buying landed property, both rubber and valuable urban land. They seldom or never brought their wives with them. They lived in bachelors' chummeries with Indian domestic servants to cook for them. When one left, his replacement would move into his residence and his way of life. They formed a Nattukottai Chettyar Chamber of Commerce to look after their interests. Because of their wealth and their long tradition of activity in Malaya, they had some impact on Indian social life.

With the stoppage of labour migration, it was immigrants of this type that predominated. We must here take into account the number of minor employees of these commercial establishments who were all brought over from India. At the outbreak of the war many of their number were repatriated, but most came back at the end of the war. The end of labour immigration meant that a larger proportion of immigrants were now those following commercial pursuits. In 1931, of the number of Indians in gainful employment in Malaya, the proportion engaged in commerce

[22] E. Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of South India*, Vol. V (Madras, 1909), s.v. *Nattukottai Chettiar*.

was 5·6 per cent. In 1947 this had increased to 10·1 per cent. The content of the commercial and professional element of the Indian population is more heterogenous than that of the labouring groups. The latter are primarily made up of one community, the Tamils, while the former are very mixed, consisting of various North Indian communities, Tamils, Malayalees, and Muslims.

Before the war a vast majority of Indians in Malaya were employed as plantation labour. In the 1931 Census, the proportion of gainfully-employed Indians listed as employed in 'agriculture, hunting, fishing and forestry' was 60 per cent. All these were of course employed in plantation agriculture. In 1947 the proportion had declined somewhat, though at 53 per cent it still represented by far the most important economic activity of the Indians. The significance of this Indian contribution becomes more evident when we relate Indians employed as plantation labour to the total plantation labour force of the country in these years. In the pre-war years, Indian labour constituted about 75 per cent of the total force, declining in 1947 to about 50 per cent. A large majority of these worked in rubber plantations. Coconut and oil palm followed far behind as employers of Indian labour. Then there was tea, which was developed in the highlands of Pahang from the 1930s. In all these crops Indians formed the majority of the labour force.

Indians played an insignificant role in tin-mining, the other major industry of Malaya. Right up to the 1930s the labour force here was almost entirely dominated by the Chinese. After the Depression some Indians, thrown out of work in the estates, moved into the mines. The Sikhs first went in for labour in the mines. When Europeans moved into controlling positions in the mining industry, they tried to diversify the labour force by employing more Indian labour, but the number involved was never substantial.

Indian labour was also prominent in the work-force engaged in the various transport services. In the construction of roads, railways, and telecommunications systems, the labour employed was predominantly Indian, from the inception of these works. They were all State undertakings,

and the labour was recruited direct from India by the Government. In later years, the policy of encouraging Malays to come into these services tended to reduce the predominance of Indian labour.

Population, Settlement, and Immigration after 1947[23]

Just as Indian opinion exerted an influence on official Indian policy towards assisted labour emigration from India before the war, Malay opinion began to assert the same influence on British immigration policy after the war. Early in the 1940s, Malay opinion was beginning to form itself on the whole question of unrestricted immigration into Malaya. Educated Malays were becoming alarmed at the thousands of Chinese and Indian immigrants flooding the country, providing cheap labour and enjoying the benefits of employment, only to depart with what they had made out of it. They felt that this was keeping the Malays out of their share in the benefits of the plantation boom. And they were worried at the demographic effects of the migration movement on the position of the Malays as the autochthonous inhabitants of the land. This was one of the first issues around which Malay nationalist opinion began to form itself.

So far, it was solely the needs of the labour market and ultimately, the interests of the developing industries and services of the country that had dictated migration policy. Restrictions on immigration, if any, were imposed purely on economic grounds; otherwise the door was open. After the war, Malaya, which had seen little or no political consciousness, was awakened politically, and nationalist bodies were able to make themselves felt and heard in governmental policy. So the migration policy of the colonial government had to be framed not only with economic but with political considerations in mind.

India's ban on the emigration of labour had caused some

[23] Statistical evidence based on H. Fell, *1957 Population Census of the Federation of Malaya, Report No. 14* (Kuala Lumpur, 1960); S. C. Chua, *State of Singapore: Report on the Census of Population* (Singapore, 1964).

years of labour shortage. But after a time, the labour situation evened itself out with the increasing readiness of Malays to offer themselves for plantation labour. Yet immigration from India did not cease. Now it was limited to those who came in paying their own passage, to earn a living as domestic servants, shop assistants, hawkers, pedlars, clerks, and in the professions. This movement came increasingly under the scrutiny of Malay nationalists, who had by now organized themselves effectively and were able to form public opinion. They would ask questions in the Legislative Council on the number and categories of Indians to whom entry permits had been given annually. They pressed for a total ban on all types of immigration of Indians and Chinese. The British Government was not unresponsive to these demands. Immigration from India had served its purpose, as far as British economic interests were concerned. There was a satisfactory work force in the country to serve the plantations and State undertakings.

The argument of those who pressed for immigration control was that the post-war Indian inflow was such as to depress wages and living standards, and create tensions among communities. Further, these immigrants would impose a burden on the welfare facilities, particularly medical services and education, available in the country, and thus affect the domiciled population adversely. Consequently, action was initiated in 1949, and two Acts were passed which came into operation in 1953. By these Acts the entry of Indians into Malaya was controlled. The categories of Indians who could enter Malaya were defined as: Federal Citizens, subjects of a ruler of a Malay State, British subjects born, naturalized, or ordinarily resident in Malaya, and aliens with Residents' Certificates. Wives, and children under 18 of all these persons were also admitted. Rules were passed to govern the admission of any new immigrant. Such a person must have professional or specialist qualifications that would enable him to follow a profession without prejudicing the interests of persons already in Malaya with similar qualifications. The rules also admitted an employee of a private firm, provided he

had a minimum remuneration that was to be determined by the Government. This sum was then fixed at 500 Dollars (Malayan) per month, which kept out the seekers of low-grade employment who had formed the bulk of the post-war immigrants. In 1959 the rules were further tightened, fixing the minimum salary at 1,200 Dollars per month. This kept out all but the highest qualified professional and technical personnel. Indians were highly concerned at these restrictions, and unsuccessfully protested against them. It particularly affected Indian shop-owners, who generally employed low-paid hands from India. They pointed out that they had to employ these people because they did all their transactions and kept their accounts in Tamil, or some other Indian language.

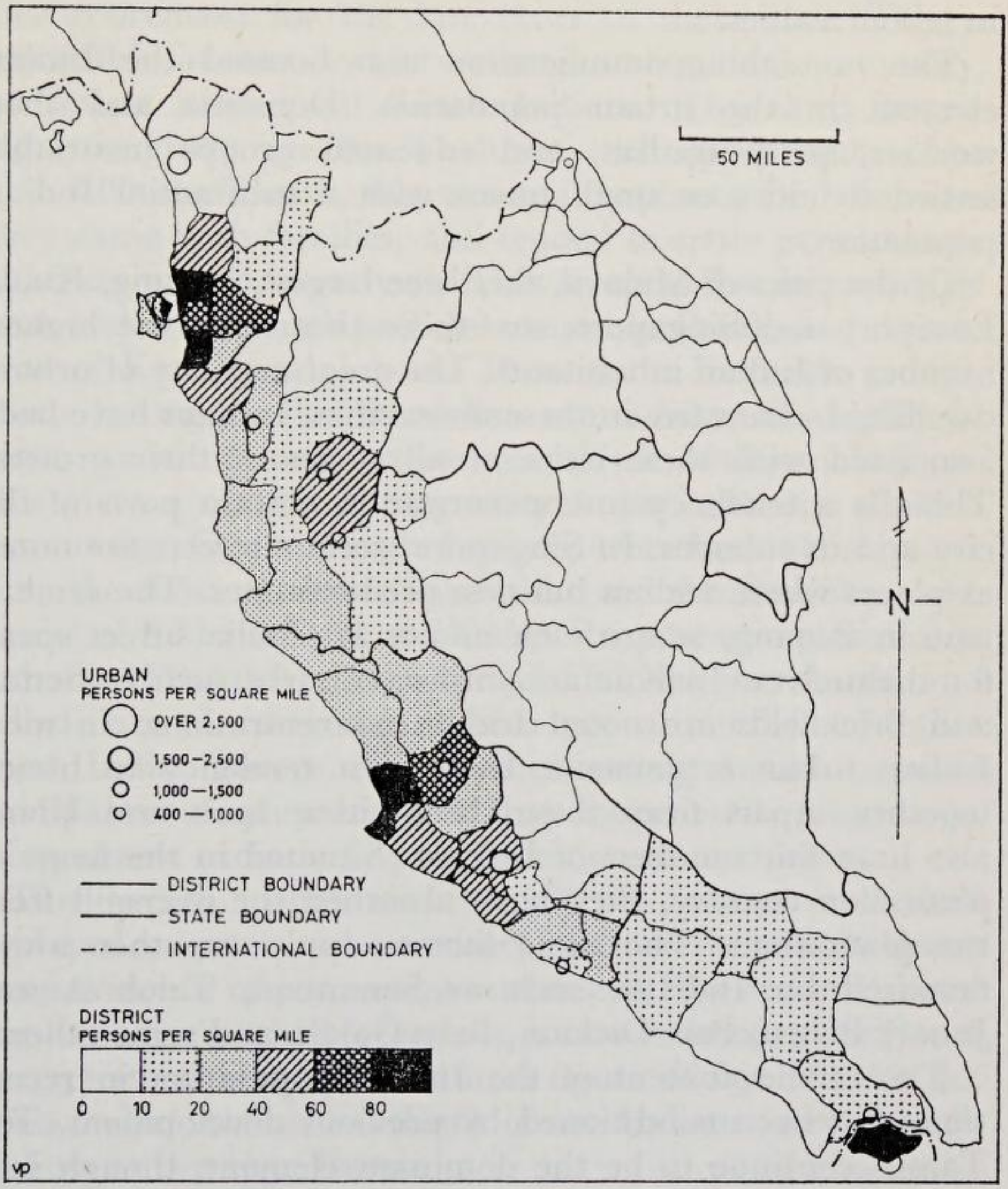
The Indian inflow in post-war years was more heterogenous than before. A number of North Indians came in, particularly during and after the partition of India, when Punjabis and Bengalees emigrated to Malaya. The period also seems to have seen a substantial Malayalee middle-class intake. Singapore's phenomenal growth in post-war years attracted North Indian capitalists and financiers. But in all these cases the numbers involved were not so large as to disturb the established ingredients of the Indian population.

In the period after 1947, the Indian population settled down to a natural and internally-ordained growth, unaffected by the vagaries of inflow and outflow that had caused constant changes in the years before the war. The trickle of non-labour immigration stopped with the Immigration Laws of 1953. Its distribution had already been settled by the factors of economic development of the previous period. After the war, and even after independence in 1957, plantations continued to be the major prop of the Malayan economy. Thus 95 per cent of the Indian population in the entire Malaysia–Singapore region continued to be settled in the western part of the Malay Peninsula. The state of Selangor, with about 25 per cent, contains the largest share of Indians, while Perak comes a close second with 21 per cent. The island of Singapore has 15 per cent,

while Penang, Johore, and Kedah have around 8 per cent each. Negri Sembilan has a little over 6 per cent, and Malacca and Pahang have a little under 3 per cent. The states on the east coast of Malaya have negligible numbers, being under 1 per cent, and the states of East Malaysia have even less. Thus the Indians continue to be distributed in the plantation country stretching from southern Kedah to Negri Sembilan, and the urban complexes that have grown in these regions. Even in these states Indians are nucleated around the plantation-developed areas, and around particular cities and towns that have developed in these parts.

One of the characteristics of general demographic developments in Malaya is the growing urbanization of the country. The 1947 Census showed 35 per cent of the country's population living in cities or towns of over 1,000 inhabitants. In 1957 this had increased to 48 per cent, making Malaya one of the most highly urbanized countries in Asia. Indians were affected by this growing urbanization. In 1947, 39 per cent of Indians lived in cities and towns of over 1,000 inhabitants, and by 1957 this had risen to 47 per cent. The trend is doubtless continuing, probably at a faster pace.

The drift from the estates to neighbouring towns had been going on slowly since the Depression, as at that time the Indians first realized that the plantations might not be secure sources of employment. The war and the consequent disturbance of the economy of the plantations further accelerated this process. A new factor came into play in the 1950s with the subdivision of estates, throwing out of employment a substantial part of the labour force previously employed on these estates. The unemployed had no alternative but to move to the nearest town or to the big city in search of work, and indeed of a roof over their heads. The drift of the younger generation from the plantations is a continuing phenomenon, as estate labour begins to be looked upon as degrading by the progressively advancing Indian community. Better education, even if he has grown up on the estates where education is hard to come by, makes the labourer's son set his sights high, and look beyond the plantations for his future. It is well known to those who



Map 1. Malaya: urban Indian population (1957)

have moved among older labourers on the estates, that they would get their sons out of the estates if they could. In this way, the economic process of the diminution of opportunity on the plantations is supplemented by a psychological shift in labour values.

The non-labour immigration also boosted the Indian element in the urban population. Domestic and shop workers, petty traders, and educated groups invariably settled in cities or small towns with a substantial Indian population.

Of the cities of Malaya, the three largest, Penang, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore, are those that have the highest number of Indian inhabitants. The great majority of urban-dwelling Indians live in these three cities. Indians have been associated with these cities at all stages of their growth. There is a tendency to concentrate in certain parts of the city and its suburbs. In Singapore, certain streets are noted as places where Indian business predominates. The same is true in Penang, where such names as Chulia Street speak for themselves. In Kuala Lumpur, suburbs such as Sentul and Brickfields are noted Indian concentrations. In most Indian urban settlements, there is a tendency to bunch together. Apart from these three cities, Ipoh and Klang also have fair numbers of Indians. Situated in the heart of plantation country, they have absorbed the overspill from the plantations. The same factors apply to other towns favoured by Indians, such as Seremban, Telok Anson, Johore Bahru, Port Dickson, Batu Gajah, and some others.

The ethnic content of the Indian population in recent times has been conditioned by previous development. The Tamils continue to be the dominant element, though in a smaller proportion. In 1957 they constituted 80 per cent of the Indians of the Federation of Malaya. The second largest linguistic group are the Malayalees. They now constitute over 7 per cent. They are a partly middle-class and partly working-class community. Malayalee workers are employed in estates, in heavy industrial labour, and in the docks. The middle-class section of the Malayalee community is in the professions, and in clerical employment

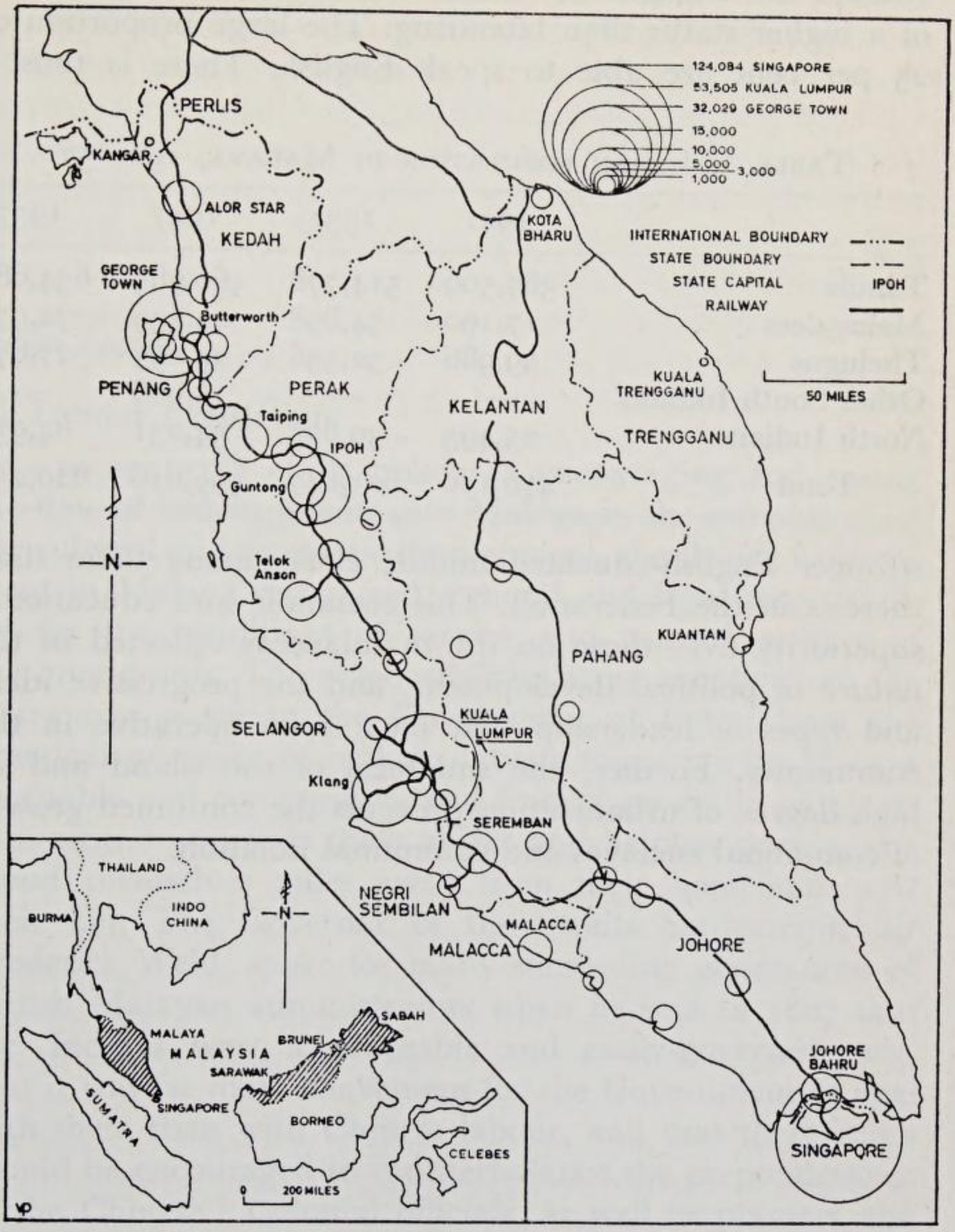
in Government offices, private firms, and the British military and naval bases. Among Indian groups they tend to have the strongest ties with their motherland. Even after a long stay in Malaya they will return to their homes in India after retirement for the last years of their lives. This is responsible for the very low sex-ratio among this community, the lowest among all South Indians. The third largest linguistic group are the Thelugus with 4 per cent of the total. Like the Tamils, they are mainly plantation labourers. They came with families, and tended to settle permanently in this country from early on. They live together in particular areas and estates such as Telok Anson in Perak, and certain parts of Kedah and Johore. These three linguistic groups, which belong to the Dravidian ethno-linguistic family in India, constitute over 90 per cent of all Malayan Indians. This gives a certain homogeneity to an otherwise divided community. Of the North Indians, who form about 9 per cent, the most predominant by far are the Punjabis, who consist of Sikhs as well as Hindus. In post-war years Sikhs and other Punjabis entered the professional, mercantile, and skilled labour categories. There are a number of other North Indian groups, none of them strong enough to make an impact as a community. But they are generally prosperous, being almost exclusively professionals and merchants.

The Indian community which for many years had displayed migrant and transitory characteristics now shows every evidence of permanent settlement. The sex imbalance that has been marked for so long is now redressing itself, and in 1957 stood at a more natural figure of 692 females per 1,000 males. About two-thirds of the Indians were born in Malaya at the 1957 Census.

It is also clear that the Indians, though forming an overall minority of about 11 per cent of Malaya's population, are not physically submerged in it. Their manner of migration and settlement has ensured for them certain areas of Indian dominance, or at least of a substantial Indian presence. This was easy enough to arrange in the plantations, where they were housed in specially constructed quarters grouped together in a division of an estate. As these estates

were grouped end to end in particular parts of the country, it was possible for these parts to have large Indian concentrations. As Indians moved into cities and towns this clustering continued. Newcomers tended to move to those parts where their compatriots already lived, both out of a feeling of security and to share in the services already built up around the community. Before Independence, official policy too tended to encourage this. It was easier to deal with communities separately than to grapple with the many problems that arose when they came together. But things began to change after Independence. Other communities moved into and around the estates. In the cities, as rigorous standards of urbanization are imposed, it becomes more difficult to maintain these settlements nucleated around particular communities. The middle class is now begining to move into the modern multi-racial suburbs. The old Indian-dominated shop houses are being progressively pulled down to make way for modern business centres. Thus in the cities the Indians will soon lose their communal enclaves. In the rural areas, however, the change will be slow. The type of Indian settlement here will continue until the pattern of plantation agriculture is changed and reorganized.

In Singapore, the 1947 Census confirmed the trend in the mainland as regards the Indian content of its population. There was a proportionate decline from 9·1 per cent of the island's total population in 1931, to 7·3 in 1947. In 1957, with conditions stabilizing somewhat, there was an increase in their ratio to 8 per cent. The Tamils are here too the predominant group among Indians, though at 63 per cent they are not as markedly dominant as in the Federation. The Malayalees have a higher proportionate strength in Singapore than in the Federation, being 16 per cent. This is largely accounted for by their strong presence in the port labour force and in the British naval and military base. Tamils are found in numbers in the island's harbour, transport, and conservancy work-force. Diverse North Indian groups are represented in somewhat larger percentages here than in the Federation, and are primarily engaged in



Map 2. Malaya: density of Indian population (1957)

commercial pursuits. In Singapore, a greater number of Indians are engaged in various forms of economic activity of a higher status than labouring. The large proportion of 25 per cent are able to speak English. There is thus a

TABLE 1. INDIAN POPULATION IN MALAYA, 1921–57

	1921	1931	1947	1957
Tamils	387,509	514,778	460,985	634,681
Malayalees	17,190	34,898	44,339	72,971
Thelugus	39,986	32,536	24,093	27,670
Other South Indians	—	—	15,968	—
North Indians	25,495	39,635	54,231	84,934
Total	470,180	621,847	599,616	820,256

stronger English-educated middle class among them than there is in the Federation. This economic and educational superiority over those on the mainland is reflected in the nature of political development, and the progressive ideas and types of leadership that have been operative in the community. Further, the smallness of the island and its high degree of urbanization prevents the continued growth of communal enclaves and communal isolation.

III | Indian Society in Malaya, 1880–1945

Indian Labour

(i) Labour Legislation

As a consequence of its policy of encouraging and easing the flow of Indian labour into Malaya in the interests of its agricultural and economic development, the British Government in Malaya recognized a moral and legal responsibility for the conditions of service and general welfare of the immigrants. The responsibilities arose equally from the guarantees given to the Government of India, from the practical necessity of making labour migration to Malaya profitable and competitive, and from a generally paternalistic attitude towards these abject and helpless people who found themselves miles away from their homelands and their kin. The Governor of the Straits Settlements, Sir Frederick Weld, spoke for many succeeding generations of British Malayan administrators when he said in 1887 that the Indians were a peaceable and easily-governed race, that it was far more convenient for the Government to deal with them than with Chinese labour, and that their influx should be encouraged to counterbalance the preponderance of the Chinese.[1] Colonial officials, as well as planters and other employers of immigrant labour, kept harping on this theme till well into the 1930s. The principle of legislating separately for Indian and Chinese communities was openly accepted in 1903, when the Government asserted its responsibility for the special protection of the Indian because of his peculiarly weak position in the country. A combination of

[1] Cited in J. Norman Parmer, op. cit., p. 19.

all these factors produced an extensive apparatus of legislation and administration to look after diverse aspects of the service and welfare of Indian labour.

In keeping with the policy of dealing separately with the two main communities of immigrant labour—the Chinese and the Indian—they were looked after by two separate authorities. For the Chinese, there was appointed in 1877 a Protector of Chinese who, with a staff of the Protectorate, concerned himself with all questions relating to Chinese labour. Later, this was expanded into the Department of Chinese Affairs. In the case of the Indians, the first such assumption of administrative responsibility was the appointment of an Indian Immigration Agent in 1884. This was done partly to fall in line with pressing Indian demands for guarantees of protection for emigrants, but it was the beginning of the significant growth of an institution which was soon to be entrusted with innumerable responsibilities relating to Indian labour. In 1899 the designation of this post was changed to Superintendent of Immigrants. Assistant Immigration Agents were appointed to the States where Indian estate labour was found in numbers. The functions of these officers, who worked in the Indian Immigration Department, were to encourage immigration and to look after the immigrants.

With the enormous increase in immigration in the first decade of the twentieth century, it became impossible for one department to perform both these duties satisfactorily. The conditions of service of indentured labour were now attracting much official and public attention both in Britain and in India, and the Secretary of State for Colonies was persuaded in 1909 to appoint a committee (the Sanderson Committee) to report on Indian emigration to British territories. The Committee recommended that officers of higher status should be responsible for the protection of Indian labour in the colonies and dependencies.[2] Consequently, a Labour Department was established in Malaya in 1911 under an officer who was later called the

[2] *Report of the Committee on Emigration from India to the Crown Colonies and Protectorates*, 1910, Cd. 5192.

Controller of Labour. The Labour Department absorbed the Indian Immigration Department, and had a larger number of officers and staff. The Department had jurisdiction in the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States; its headquarters were in Kuala Lumpur. Initially it had two Deputy Controllers, one in Penang, the other in Kuala Lumpur, with responsibility for the S.S. and the F.M.S. respectively. There were a number of Assistant Controllers of Labour who were distributed in Labour Offices in towns located in the large plantation districts. Later, Indian Extra-Assistant Controllers were appointed to these offices. All officers down to the rank of Assistant Controller were British members of the Malayan Civil Service. Part of their training took them to Madras for a year or so, where they learned the Tamil or Thelugu languages, as well as something of the societies and cultures of these people. Thus the Department of Labour right down to 1940 was predominantly concerned with the supply and protection of Indian labour. The legislative and administrative machinery was geared towards the performance of this function.

A series of Acts were passed to provide a legislative framework for the protection of Indian labour. The Indian Immigration Ordinance of 1884 was the first major piece of legislation in this direction. Its intention was to safeguard some of the interests of indentured labour. By this Act, contracts with labourers had to be made under certain prescribed terms, and had to be entered into before the Immigration Agent. It also prescribed the manner in which such labour was to be treated, and laid down the punishable offences against and by it. The Agent was empowered to inspect places where indentured labour was employed.

One of the recurring features concerning labour legislation and the welfare of labourers in Malaya in these years was the wide gulf between law and fact. The passing of a law relating to some abuse was by no means a guarantee of the eradication of that abuse. The chief reason for this was the enormity of the problems and the paucity of resources to deal with them. At this time, the Immigration Agent and

his officers, who were primarily concerned with the smooth inflow of labour into Malaya, could spare few resources for the administration of Acts such as that of 1884.

The actual treatment of labour, particularly indentured labour, worsened. The Government appointed a Commission in 1890 to investigate the conditions of labour and suggest means of encouraging immigration. One of the recommendations of the Commission was that the conditions of labour in Malaya should be improved so that it could compete favourably with other colonies that were attracting Indian labour.[3] As a result, the Government passed an Ordinance in 1892 for the improvement of the conditions of indentured labour. The planters opposed this Ordinance because they wanted the improvement of labour conditions to go hand-in-hand with the assumption by the Government of the responsibility for recruiting labour. The Ordinance does not appear to have been brought into operation. Another Labour Commission, reporting in 1896, endorsed the recommendations of the earlier Commission, and again an Act was passed in the Straits Settlements Legislature.[4] This Act also contained measures safeguarding some of the rights of the Indian labourer, but again it was not brought into operation.

The next important piece of labour legislation was the Act of 1899, which experienced a better fate than those which preceded it. By this Act, the minimum wage of indentured labour was increased. More rigorous responsibilities were imposed on employers for the provision of housing, medical facilities, and sanitary arrangements, and there was also provision for the inspection of places of employment. An Act of 1904 further improved the wages and conditions of indentured labour, and attempted to bring about some supervision over the employment of *kangany*-recruited labour. It must be admitted that these acts were all motivated more by a desire to ease the flow of labour than to see that justice was done to the labourer.

[3] Straits Settlements, *Report of the Labour Commission, 1891*.

[4] Straits Settlements, *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Enquire into the Question of Indian Immigration, Proceedings of the Legislative Council*, 1896.

It was more important, so far as relations with the Indian Government were concerned, that these Acts were on the Statute Book than that there were officers in the field actually enforcing their provisions. This, combined with the insufficiency of enforcing staff, resulted in many of these provisions being ignored or inadequately complied with. Nevertheless, these measures show the slow but unmistakeable progress towards protective labour legislation.

There was however an urgent practical reason for more prompt enforcement of legislation. In addition to sickness, epidemics, and high mortality rates in the depots in India and on board ship, the Penang and Port Swettenham depots also took heavy tolls. Even those labourers who survived this traumatic experience and reached their places of work contracted diseases and died in large numbers, making the whole operation uneconomic, let alone inhuman. For many years, until well into the twentieth century, the mortality rate of Indians was the highest among the races inhabiting Malaya. Whilst this was the norm, the special occurrence of epidemics compounded the tragedy, such as the cholera epidemics in Penang in 1900 and 1911.[5] Mortality among indentured labour was much higher than in the rest of the labour force. It attracted the attention of the Indian Government and the British Parliament, and led the Colonial Office to initiate steps that led eventually to the abolition of indenture contracts in Malaya in 1913. These compelling practical reasons were brought to bear on the problem of Indian labour, and resulted in more effective measures of control and enforcement. Events led naturally to the formation of the Labour Department in 1911. The machinery of immigration had been separated and streamlined with the formation of the Indian Immigration Committee in 1907. It now remained for the labour laws to be regularized and enforced by a body which would be concerned predominantly with this function.

This was accomplished by the comprehensive legislation known as the Labour Code of 1912. The Code brought together all the labour laws that had been passed piecemeal

[5] Parmer, op. cit., pp. 58–9.

in the State Councils of the Federated States and the recently-established Federal Council. It contained provisions for all kinds of labour in the F.M.S. and consisted of eleven parts. It had measures to regulate general conditions for all labour, as well as separate sections for Indian and Chinese labour. In the sections of general application, there were provisions regulating the length and validity of agreements and contracts, the maximum hours of work per day and days per week for normal wages, the inspection of places of employment, and the right of labourers (or the Labour Department on their behalf) to initiate action against their employers. Of greatest value and relevance to Indian labour was Part VIII of the Code, which enabled the Government to impose certain minimum standards in housing, medical and hospital facilities, and health and sanitary arrangements on the estates. The provisions regarding punishment for labour offences were still severe. Fines or imprisonment could be imposed for failure or refusal to work, disobedience, desertion, and wilful self-injury. That the Planters' Association of Malaya was unhappy with many of the provisions of this Code is testimony of its potential effectiveness in protecting the workers.

The planters would have liked to see in the Code some provision to restrict 'crimping', the enticement by one employer of labour that had been recruited from India by another employer through his *kangany*. The inclusion of such a provision would have involved the restriction of the freedom of movement of the labourer. The one major improvement in the position of the labourer after the period of indenture was that he was now a free labourer. He could give a month's notice to his employer, or a month's wages in lieu of notice, and leave the estate for other employment. The increasing demand for labour in the second decade of the twentieth century made the practice of 'crimping', by the offer of higher wages and other inducements, more widespread. The planters wanted the Code to restrict the liberty of the labourer for a fixed period after he had been recruited from India by a particular employer. The Government did not give in to the wishes of the planters.

The planters were also critical of the penal sanctions provided in the Code to ensure the maintenance of standards in living and working conditions in places of employment. They particularly disliked the power given to the Government to prohibit the employment of labourers on any estate considered unfit for employment. Here too the Government did not give in. In fact, an amendment to the Code in 1921 went even further by enforcing the responsibility of the employer for the dependants of labourers. One undesirable feature of the 1912 Code was its treatment of purely labour offences as criminal offences, and the imposition of penalties of imprisonment for many categories of such offences. This was removed by an amendment of 1923, largely on the initiative of the Government of India, and these offences were now treated as civil offences with fines as penalties.

The next landmark in labour legislation was the Code of 1923, made necessary by the important Indian Emigration Act passed by the Government of India in 1922. The Indian Act had laid down many new conditions and terms governing the employment of Indian labour if emigration to a particular country was to be authorized by the Indian Government. It was now incumbent on the Malayan Governments to incorporate these conditions into their own labour laws if Malaya was to continue to be eligible as a recipient of Indian labour. Hence the Code of 1923, which replaced that of 1912, and was equally comprehensive in its scope. Like the code of 1912 it had parts that were of general application to all labour, and parts which provided for Indian and Chinese labour separately. It covered both the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States.

Many of its provisions were a re-enactment of the old law. But there were some important additions. It made provisions for free repatriation of Indian labourers within one year of their arrival in Malaya for reasons of ill-health or unjust treatment by employers. The labourer could not be held to make contracts of more than one month's duration. The mimumum age for Indian child labour was fixed at 10 years. A very significant provision was that the powers given to the Controller of Labour by the previous code to

enter and inspect places of employment of Indian labour, were now conferred on the Agent of the Government of India, henceforth to be resident in Malaya. The Controller of Labour, further, could order the establishment and maintenance of nurseries and schools for children of labourers. The employers were required to provide maternity allowances for female labourers. The Indian Immigration Committee was authorized to prescribe standard wage rates for Indian labour. Finally, many of the penalties for purely labour offences were removed.

Some amendments to the Code were effected, partly on account of the recommendations of the Indian Agent, and partly because of immediate needs. By an amendment of 1925 employers were required to provide a labourer with a minimum of twenty-four days work per month, or wages for this period, if he presented himself and was fit for work. The standard wage rate was extended to cover child labour. Employers were required to post an abstract of the labour laws in the Indian vernacular languages (Tamil and Thelugu) at places of employment. An amendment of 1927 required employers to set aside a minimum of one-sixteenth of an acre of estate land for the use of each labourer with dependants living on the estate. The labourer could either cultivate some food crops on this land or graze his cattle. The land was to be cleared and prepared by the employer at his expense. This provision, though not immediately significant, was to grow in importance in the future.

The laws thus passed gave effective statutory protection to the Indian labourer. But what was more necessary was the effective application of the law. The planting industry obviously disliked these rigorous protective laws. It is clear from the observations made by their representatives on the Federal Council that they did not expect the Labour Department to apply strictly the provisions relating to education, health, and land allotment.[6] The only Indian member of the Straits Settlements Legislative Council, Mr. P. K. Nambyar, welcomed the new law, observing that the Indian labourer would as a result be raised to the status

[6] F.M.S., *Proceedings of the Federal Council*, 1923, pp. B107–10.

of a free citizen. He was also aware, however, that no benefit was likely to accrue to the labourer unless the law was properly administered.[7]

(ii) Wages

It was in fixing wages that the Indian labourer needed the most protection. Unlike his Chinese counterpart, he was completely helpless and utterly inarticulate in arriving at a suitable wage through negotiation. So this had to be done for him by somebody who would advance a case on his behalf, and see that he was not the victim of exploitation. In the early years of immigration labour under the indenture system, wages were fixed by Indian law. For privately recruited labour, there was for a long time no means of fixing wages. The first attempt to lay down wages in Malaya was in 1884 when a Straits Settlements Ordinance stipulated the following rates for Indian labourers on three year contracts: 12 cents a day for the first year and 14 cents a day for subsequent years for adult males; 8 cents a day for the first year and 10 cents a day for subsequent years for females and males under 21 years of age.[8] A labourer was to be required to work not longer than six days in a week and not more than nine hours a day, of which not more than six hours could be consecutive. These hours of work remained basic to all labour laws for a long time. If the labourer worked for six full days he was entitled to the seventh day's pay without working. Later, changes were introduced making the wage rates flexible. Food was provided by the employers free of charge on working days.

With the demand for labour, wage rates increased. Unindentured labour was generally paid higher rates than indentured labour. When free labour fully replaced indentured labour in 1913, there was no statutory control of wages. The Government attempted to maintain wage rates by controlling the supply of labour through immigration. Even though a labourer was theoretically free to go where

[7] Straits Settlements, *Proceedings of the Legislative Council*, 1923, pp. B114–15.

[8] One Malayan Dollar = 2s. 4d. = Indian Rupees 1·75 up to 1930, thereafter Rs 1·55.

he liked for the best rates once he was brought into the country, the constant supply of labour and combined action among employers prevented any increase in wages. Planters attacked the problem of the rise in wages by keeping down the labourer's cost of living. Thus estates ran their own shops, where basic necessities such as rice would be sold to the labourers at wholesale rates. But planters were up against the general tendency of food prices, particularly rice, to go up after the First World War. Then there was the fall in the rate of exchange between the Dollar and the Indian Rupee, from 1·75 Rupees to the Dollar before the war to 1·55 in 1930. This affected the savings and remittances of labourers for whom the chance of sending money home was the only attraction of migrating.

From 1920 these questions were investigated more systematically. The Planters' Association appointed a Committee known as the General Labour Committee to go into all questions of labour supply. This Committee examined in detail the monthly budget of the labourer at prevailing prices, and recommended that a minimum wage be fixed throughout the country. This wage ought to be 50 cents per day for males and 40 cents for females. It also recommended that rice and other provisions be sold to the labourer below cost, and that the planters subsidize the remittance of the labourer so that he could get a favourable rate of exchange. It recommended many other welfare measures for the estate labourer, not all of which were implemented.[9]

What was important, however, was that the planters were converted to a minimum wage policy, though they later disowned some of their Committee's suggestions on the grounds that they were no longer relevant. The standard wage, in place of the minimum wage, was accepted by the Malayan Governments in 1922, and the Indian Immigration Committee was authorized to prescribe standard rates. It is doubtful whether this Committee was the kind of independent body that could undertake such an exercise, and the Government of India gave expression to such doubts. With five planter members, the Committee had a majority of

[9] Parmer, op. cit., pp. 175–8.

plantation employers of labour. And even the three Government officials were not a disinterested party, because the Government was a substantial employer of Indian labour. Later on, two Indian non-official members were appointed to the Committee, but they belonged to the professional class and were not very knowledgeable on labour matters. It was on this body that the influence of the Indian Agent was most felt. The Agent constantly made representations to the Committee on standard wages; he was armed with all the facts of estate wages, cost of living, and the like, and he could express himself freely on these questions. He fought to establish the principle that the standard wage should be fixed so as to enable the labourer and his dependants to lead a decent life, and save something towards the cost of his passage to India every two years, and for his old age.

The wage inquiries of the Committee resulted in the fixing of two different standard wage structures for two types of areas. There were first of all the 'key areas', by which was meant districts which were well located, healthy, and where prices were low. Then there were the 'non-key areas', which were the inaccessible areas in the interior, such as in the state of Pahang, where labourers generally did not want to go, and food prices were higher. In the key areas rates were fixed in 1924 at 35 cents per day for males and 27 cents for females.[10] In 1925 this was raised to 40 cents and 30 cents, respectively, and in 1927 to 50 cents and 40 cents.[11] The increases generally followed the prevailing trend for increases in wages for all labour. In 1927 the first inquiry for a non-key area or inaccessible district in Pahang was held, and wages were fixed at 58 cents for males and 46 cents for females.[12] In those areas to which labour had to be induced, wages were usually about 10–15 per cent higher than in so-called key areas, but this did not have much effect on the movement of labour because of the reluctance of estate workers to move from estates where they had been working for some time.

With the Depression and the fall in the price of rubber,

[10] F.M.S., *Annual Report of the Labour Department*, 1924, p. 9.
[11] Ibid., 1925, p. 9. [12] Ibid., 1927, p. 9.

there was great pressure for a reduction of the standard wage. An inquiry was held in July 1930, and it was decided to reduce the wage in key areas to 40 cents for men and 32 cents for women, and to 47 cents for men and 37 cents for women in inaccessible areas.[13] As the Depression gathered momentum and rubber prices fell steeply, employers found that they had to make wage and production cuts. It was difficult to maintain the standard wage without recourse to mass repatriation. The Labour Department did not want the depression of wages below the standard wage; it would rather have seen the labour force disbanded and repatriated so that wages could be kept at the standard level. But it became impossible to maintain the standard wage, so the Committee fixed a monthly sum that represented a decent subsistence wage for males and females, which the employer had to pay or the labourers in that estate would be repatriated.[14]

Employers adopted another means to depress wages. In normal times, though a working day was statutorily fixed at nine hours, a labourer earned his full day's wage for anything between six and eight hours of morning work. Now the employer began to pay him proportionate wages for that period, without offering him the full nine hours work. What this meant was that the minimum wage dropped to 28 cents for men and 24 cents for women for morning work of six to six and a half hours. It must be said that the Labour Department took every step in its power to ensure that the labourer received a living wage or, failing that, had a chance to return to India. Though repatriation was a counter to the depression of wages, there were areas where labourers refused to take advantage of this opportunity, and preferred to remain on their estates, working for starvation wages or even with no work at all.

When the price of rubber began to recover, the Government of India and the Labour Department began to apply pressure on the planters to increase wages. The Indian Government tied the demand for a wage increase to the granting of permission for labour recruitment. The planters

[13] Ibid., 1930, p. 10. [14] Ibid., 1932, p. 14.

were very reluctant to put up wages, and fought every inch of the way. In 1936 the Planters' Association agreed to increase the daily wages to 40 cents and 32 cents, which was still lower than the wages before the Depression. But with the outbreak of war in Europe in 1939 and the increased demand for rubber, the industry in Malaya could stretch itself fully. In 1940 there was full employment on the estates. Though the standard wage continued at 40 cents and 32 cents, the actual wages paid from 1938 were back to the pre-Depression best of 50 cents and 40 cents. The fact that the employment and wage position stabilized at this level is largely due to the Indian ban on assisted labour emigration to Malaya in 1938. One of the factors that weighed heavily in influencing the decision of the Indian Government was the threatened, and later actual, wage reduction by 5 cents in 1938. The Sastri Inquiry, initiated by the Government of India in 1936, had considered the wages question. Sastri recommended early in 1937 that it was now opportune to restore the pre-Depression standard rates of 50 cents and 40 cents. He had further stated that the distinction between key and non-key areas had broken down, and that the minimum wage should be peninsular-wide.[15] While the Indian Government was thus convinced of the case for a wage increase, the planting interests were actually considering a wage reduction. The timely ban of the Indian Government helped to strengthen the position of the labourer, who received a steady wage and enjoyed full employment until the Japanese invasion.

South Indian labourers in this period almost unanimously preferred the fixed daily wage or the time rate. There were other systems of payment that they might have taken advantage of. The Chinese, in large measure, were contract labourers, and were paid by task or by results. Thus while the take-home pay of the South Indian labourer was a fixed sum each month, that of the Chinese was likely to fluctuate. The planters were of the opinion that the South Indian was cheap when rubber prices were high, but

[15] V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, *Report on the Conditions of Indian Labour in Malaya, 6 February 1937* (Kuala Lumpur, 1937).

Chinese were preferable when prices were low. The existence of these different wage systems created heavy differentials in earnings among the two groups. In the period 1925–40 Chinese tappers on the average earned 50–100 per cent more per day than the Indians,[16] a phenomenon that was reflected in the superior conditions of health, way of life, and indeed of upward social mobility among Chinese labourers. It is true, however, that as the years went by some Indians became contract labourers and took to task work. This was more common in the building trade, or in road and bridge construction. Even here, North Indians went in for such labour more than South Indians; they worked longer hours and earned as much as the Chinese.[17]

Whether the Indian labourer was being treated with fairness, and received a due share of the prosperity of the plantation industry was endlessly debated in this period. The planters were convinced that he was doing well by them. This conviction was based on a simple comparison between what he would get as a labourer in his own home state of Madras and what he was receiving in Malaya. It was true that when Malayan wages were converted into Rupees the labourer received a sum substantially higher than what he would receive in India. The planters would also point to the amount of savings labourers held in the Post Office Savings Bank, the aggregate of periodic remittances to India, and the unestimated savings that he would take with him on his visits to India in cash or in gold.[18] Critics of labour conditions in Malaya would show the other side of the coin. To cancel out the increased wages of Malaya there was the higher cost of living, and the necessity for a higher standard of living in an alien environment. The price of rice, the staple of Indian diet, rose steeply in this period, by 300 per cent in the 1920s. Savings and remittances were made at the cost of a

[16] See table of rates in Parmer, op. cit., p. 277.

[17] F.M.S., *Annual Report of the Labour Department*, 1940.

[18] For argument typical of the planters' case, see *Official Verbatim Report of Meeting of the Indian Immigration Committee held on October 29th, 1928*, cited in Parmer, op. cit., pp. 182–3.

parsimonious and stingy existence at bare subsistence level, injurious in the long term to the labourer's general health. The purchasing power of the Dollar, it was pointed out, was far below that of the Rupee, and hence a superficial comparison between wage rates in India and Malaya was unreal and misleading. The critics also indicated that there was no provision for the labourer in the plantations in his old age, a feature which was not equally relevant in India because of the cushioning effects of family and caste ties and obligations.[19] In this connexion the metaphor of the 'sucked orange' was often and effectively used—the labourers were supposed to be thrown aside in their old age like sucked oranges. This was also why the Indian Government always insisted that these special needs be considered when fixing the wages of Indian labourers.

(iii) Social Life

The conditions determined by the legislative enactments and the wage structure outlined above governed the life of the Indian labourer. One major factor that influenced social life was the provision of type-plan housing. Before this was standardized and controlled, conditions must have been very bad, especially in the sugar and coffee plantations. After the code of 1912 and when rubber had become the mainstay of plantation agriculture, the housing provisions of the law were implemented by employers, as it was in their interests to have a settled and healthy labour force on the estate. In the first phase, this housing consisted of what were known as 'lines'—a long building roofed with a local palm called *attap*, or sometimes with tiles or corrugated iron, which was divided down its length by a partition not reaching the roof and partitioned into rooms, back-to-back, each occupied by a family. Usually, following the Malayan style of house-building, this whole structure was lifted above the ground on piles, and room was provided underneath for kitchen and storing facilities. Partitions between rooms were

[19] For a typical statement of this view, see *Memorandum presented to Rt. Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri by the Selangor Indian Association, the Young Men's Indian Association, the Coastal Indian Association, Klang* (Kuala Lumpur, 1937), pp. 2–3.

low, and there was no privacy at all for families. Besides, one room for an entire family resulted in overcrowding and unhygienic living. Disease which broke out in one family soon spread through the entire line. Labour employed by Government was housed in similar structures put up near their places of work. Proper cement drains for the lines, a water supply in the vicinity, and communal latrines were insisted on by the law.

After 1935 there was a widespread feeling that some improvement should be effected in the type of labour housing. The Labour Department and Health Authorities condemned the barrack-like structures as unfit, and planters began rebuilding their houses in a more satisfactory manner according to approved plans. The trend now was towards building cottage-type houses. Each unit of four rooms was occupied by two families. The units were raised on piles, and the division between the two families was complete with separate entrance. Each cottage had a garden round it. which the occupants could cultivate. Increasingly, the old lines were replaced by these cottages, which were a decided improvement, promoting a healthier social life, and avoiding the congestion, public quarrels, and health hazards caused by the former type of housing.

The provision of hospital facilities and medical and maternity benefits shows a similar trend towards improvement. For the first two decades of the century, the provisions of the code were only pious intentions. Except for very few of the larger and better managed estates, which had properly equipped dispensaries with trained dressers, most got by with clerks who would administer patent medicines in an emergency. Otherwise the patient had to go to the nearest Government hospital. In 1924 a Commission was appointed to look into measures regarding health, sanitation, and hospital facilities, and the availability of medical practitioners on estates. The Commission reported the following year, and an enactment was passed in 1926 attempting to impose certain minimum standards in this respect.[20] The

[20] F.M.S., *Report of the Commision appointed to Enquire into Certain Matters affecting the Health of Estates in the Federated Malay States*, 1923.

Health Boards Enactment had some excellent provisions for co-ordinated action between land-owners and Government to ensure the maintenance of medical, sanitary, and health services. The planters opposed this scheme from the outset, refused to co-operate and forced its abandonment in a few years.[21]

With the prosperity of the rubber industry in the 1920s, estates began to employ medical practitioners individually or in groups, and to build their own hospitals. But even then there were a number of places where facilities were poor. The Sastri Report observed in 1937 that though the preventive side of estate health was good, the curative side was bad. Smaller estates still employed either insufficiently qualified dressers, or clerks and conductors who did the work of dressers. But by 1941 the general standards of sanitation and health on estates had improved greatly, and hospital and medical facilities somewhat less so.

It was in such an environment that we see the gradual growth of Indian social and religious institutions. They are the product of the labourer's attempt, consciously or unconsciously, to plant some roots in his new surroundings. The Census Report of Madras (1931) had said of the emigrating Indian labourer: 'He takes his own world with him and sets it down in his new surroundings.'[22] In this he was helped by the plantation and governmental authorities, who desired to upset him as little as possible. Thus caste taboos were observed in estate housing. Labourers of the untouchable castes, who formed over a third of the labour force, were housed in separate lines, away from those of the 'clean' castes. Provision for drinking water was also separate. The untouchables had their separate shrines, both in estates and towns, and were not allowed into the temples of the upper castes. Even in a cosmopolitan city such as Singapore, people of the *paraiyan* caste had to carry out their customary obligations, such as carrying the corpses of deceased high caste men and beating the drum at their funerals.

This persistence of caste consciousness led to the formation

[21] Parmer, op. cit., pp. 157–8.
[22] *Census of India, 1931*, Vol. XIV, 'Madras', Part I, p. 92.

of caste associations, primarily in towns but extending to estates. The depressed castes were forced into a consciousness of their identity by the discrimination they encountered and were among the first to come together and form Adi Dravida Sangams in cities and towns like Singapore, Ipoh, Penang, Malacca, and Klang. Other associations soon developed, uniting such castes as *vellalar*, *ahampadaiar*, *yadhavar*, *kallar*, and *maruthuvar*. Most marriages were within the caste, though this was difficult for minority castes and there was a tendency for allied castes to coalesce, a trend not contrary to developments in India. Niece and cross-cousin marriages, the most popular form in many Tamil castes, were the first preference, but this was not possible in many castes. Thus the Annual Labour Report of 1935 says that such marriages are not as common in Malaya as they are in India. It also finds little evidence of child marriage, the general age of marriage for girls being 16.[23] The tendency for caste taboos to be followed as closely as possible resulted from the widespread feeling that the labourer would soon get back to his village in India, and re-enter his niche in the social order. He could not do this if he was seen to have followed socially unconventional behaviour. The persistence of caste consciousness is also seen in reports of the caste clashes that occasionally occurred. In fact caste was one of the prime causes of early disturbances among labour. Such clashes occurred between untouchables and upper caste men, and between various 'clean' castes.

The Indian labourer would not have felt at home in Malaya if he had not successfully transplanted religious institutions that enabled him to practice and profess the beliefs he had brought with him. Among the amenities the estate management provided was a temple, a modest square-shaped structure, in which was enshrined a consecrated image of a deity of the Hindu Pantheon. The religion of the estate and urban labourer was akin to the village Hinduism of South India. The deities he worshipped were the village gods and goddesses. Thus most estate temples were dedicated to Kali, Mariamman, Aiyanar, and Vairavar. There were also

[23] F.M.S., *Annual Report of the Labour Department*, 1935, p. 49.

some temples to universal gods such as Siva, Ganesh, Subramanya, and Vishnu. Very few of the estate temples had Brahmin priests to officiate in them. This was done in haphazard fashion by a person selected from the highest non-Brahmin caste in the estate. He became the *pusari* or non-Brahmin priest of the temple. The temple was run by the Indian power hierarchy of the estate, consisting of the Indian clerical officers and influential *kanganys*. Contributions were received from the labourers for the upkeep of the temple and the performance of its various festivities. Later on part of the profits of the estate toddy shops were paid by the manager for temple expenses. All major Hindu festivals were celebrated, these being the labourer's only occasion for diversion from the chores of estate labour, and for the get-together of an estate community.

In spite of this successful transplanting of some aspects of folk culture in Malayan soil, a number of social problems appeared, originating in the whole process and pattern of migration and settlement. An outstanding problem relating to Indian labour society in these years concerned the maintenance of a healthy family life as the basis of social life. The Indian Emigration Act of 1922 had this in mind when it legislated the well-known sex ratio rule among emigrants. This would offset the social evils resulting from a predominantly male migrant community in foreign lands. For reasons best known to itself, and despite pressures by nationalist opinion in India and by Indian opinion in Malaya, the Indian Government repeatedly exempted Malaya from the operation of this rule. So for a long time there was a heavy imbalance in the sex ratio of the Indian labour community in Malaya. It affected family life on the estates, and the Labour Department was forced to take note of its unhealthy social effects.

It was noted very early that a high proportion of crimes among Indian labourers were committed for reasons of sex. In a community where men greatly outnumbered women, marriage became a very flimsy institution. Marital infidelity, enticement of married women, and prostitution became frequent. Officers of the Labour Department were often

called upon to adjudicate in such family disputes. Delinquent European planters added to the problem by enticing young and attractive brides of labourers. When such disputes were taken to court, the Courts had no firm guidelines to go on. Marriage among Hindus was difficult to prove in the absence of a system of registration of such marriages. The only evidence was the act of religious ceremony that had been performed, and of which evidence could not be secured for these married in India. In the case of those married in Malaya, the Courts ruled that the only admissible evidence was that of a Brahmin priest officiating at a proper Hindu ceremony. As the Indian member of the Federal Council pointed out, most marriages on estates were performed by non-Brahmin priests, and hence could not be proven before a court of law.[24]

The officers of the Labour Department took up with the Government the possibility of a system of registration for Hindu marriages solemnized in Malaya. They were supported by the planters, whose General Labour Committee of 1920 had recommended such a scheme. So the Hindu Marriage Registration Act was passed in 1924, providing for voluntary registration of marriages among Hindus. All District Officers and the Collectors of Land Revenue of Kuala Lumpur and Seremban were appointed Registrars. After six months of the operation of the act, out of twenty-eight Hindu marriages registered, at least seventeen were those of Ceylon Tamils and Indian educated classes. Thus the measure failed in its main object of encouraging labourers to register their marriages. It was thought that perhaps the provision of more easy facilities for registration might help. So estate managers of standing were empowered to act as Honorary Registrars. In 1928 the Federal Council appointed a Committee to go into the working of the Act.[25] The Committee noted that 428 marriages had been registered under the act in the period 1924–8, but again the greatest number of registrants were Ceylon Tamils and educated

[24] F.M.S., *Proceedings of the Federal Council*, 1929, B149.

[25] F.M.S., *Report on the working of the Hindu Marriage Registration Enactment 1924*, *Proceedings of the Federal Council*, 1929, C119.

Indians. The Indian Agent estimated that only seventy-four labourer marriages had been registered in this period out of over 1,500 marriages.[26] The labourer still considered registration a redundant act, the religious ceremony being in his eyes the crucial and all-important event. Hence he did not bother to take the initiative in going through the registration process, and was further discouraged by the fee of 2 Dollars. The Committee recommended some measures easing the process of registration, and wanted full information of this facility to be made known to labourers. It must be noted that registration of Hindu marriages was not yet generally practised in India. In the inter-war period, this was a major social problem that kept cropping up in the way of ugly incidents on estates and difficult cases before the courts. The Indian Agent referred to it frequently in his Annual Reports. Social reformers within the Indian community addressed their minds to it, and suggested various solutions.

The imbalance of the sexes, and the consequent absence of proper family life, was reduced in the late 1930s. By this time the estate labour community had a fair proportion of females. It was among urban workers and the pedlar and shopkeeper groups that men continued to outnumber women. This was the reason given by Sastri for his recommendation, much to the surprise and anguish of Malayan Indian opinion, that Malaya continue to be exempted from the operation of the sex ratio rule in Indian emigration law. On the estates, improved housing, with the new semi-detached cottages for families, children's crèches, nurseries and schools, maternity benefits, and hospital facilities, all helped in the direction of a healthier and more settled family life.

From the very earliest periods of immigration, the authorities had to contend with the social evil of alcoholism among the labourers, though it was considerably later that it pricked the conscience of Government, estate management, and Indian leadership. The coconut palm is common in the Malay Peninsula, and tapping toddy out of it was an easy process. Some of the Indian immigrant labourers belonged

[26] India, Agent of the Government of India, *Annual Report*, 1928, p. 21.

to the toddy tapping caste, and there were also Chinese tappers. Soon enormous quantities of toddy were being tapped and offered on sale to labourers in plantations and towns. A large majority of the labourers must have picked up the drinking habit in Malaya. In their villages in India, liquor was not so readily available, and there were the hidden controls of village and caste. Seeing the addiction of the labourer to toddy, estate managers permitted the opening of toddy shops, sometimes one in each division, or themselves established shops so that labourers could drink within the estate and closer to their homes. The habit became so widespread that the image of the Indian labourer in the eyes of the other communities of Malaya was that of an inveterate drunkard. Estate managers, in attracting labour to their estates, would advertise the easy access to toddy as an incentive. The quantities drunk were reflected in the revenues that the Government derived from the toddy tax. In the year 1935, Government revenue on toddy, at 40 per cent of the sale price, was 2,081,718 Dollars, which meant that the total amount spent by the labourers on toddy for that year was 5,204,295 Dollars.[27]

A number of bodies and interests were involved in the move to fight this addiction of the labourer. The first people to take cognisance of the problem were the planters, who, being in close proximity to the labourer, saw clearly the harm it was doing him. Soon after the planters had organized themselves into the Planters' Association of Malaya, in 1908, and thus acquired a platform to discuss common problems relating to the industry, the Association took up the question of the indiscriminate sale of liquor to labourers. In 1909 the Government established Licensing Boards to control the quality of liquor sold. In 1912 the P.A.M. asked the Government to prohibit the sale of foreign spirits to Indian labourers. The Government issued instructions to this effect in the same year. This made toddy the only liquor available to the Indians, and its consumption increased. The planters now became aware of the fact that toddy also could be injurious

[27] Central Indian Association of Malaya, *Toddy in Malaya*, Memorandum submitted to the Agent of the Government of India, December, 1937.

to the health of the labourer. This was especially so if the toddy was adulterated, and no control was exercised to prevent this. Evidence began to accumulate on the injurious effects of toddy. A number of cases of poisoning, diarrhoea, dysentery, and even death were reported after consumption of toddy. Dr. M. Watson, a medical practitioner employed by the P.A.M., made a strong case against toddy on medical grounds. In 1916 the P.A.M. pressed the Government to impose controls on the sale of toddy to Indian labourers.[28] The Government was embarrassed by the P.A.M.'s pressures for action that would curtail a good source of revenue. It thought the P.A.M. was going too far in its anti-toddy campaign, and appointed a Commission 'to enquire into certain matters affecting the good government of the State of Selangor in relation to the alleged misuse and abuse of toddy in the coastal districts of Selangor'. The report of this Commission challenged the findings of Dr. Watson and declared that pure unadulterated toddy was not injurious to health.[29] The P.A.M. felt that the report was a whitewash, and an attempt by the Government to sweep the problem under the carpet.

However, some rules were introduced in the running of toddy shops to prevent adulteration. The estate management was given the authority to run shops in the estates, which had so far been done by contractors. Toddy was not to be sold to women and children. Out of the profits from the sale of toddy, two-fifths was to be paid as tax to the Government, and the remainder was to be put in a special fund and used for the general welfare of the labourers. In practice, this money was used for a wide variety of purposes. It was used to defray expenses connected with festivities in the temple, and special ceremonies such as fire-walking and *kavadi*-bearing. It was also used to provide school uniforms for children and to buy books and presents for pupils on the annual school day. Some managers spent money from the

[28] The Planters' Association of Malaya, *Memorandum on the Toddy Committee and Commission*, Singapore, 1917.

[29] F.M.S., *Proceedings and Report of the Commission Appointed to Enquire into Certain Matters affecting the Good Government of the State of Selangor in relation to the alleged Misuse and Abuse of Toddy in the coastal districts of Selangor*, 1917.

fund to give labourers a treat on Deepavali day, and even to provide them with bonuses. Sometimes managers would abuse their trust, and use it to pay for expenses that were legitimately a charge on estate revenue. In these cases the Indian Agent would interfere by bringing them to the notice of the Labour Department. The Agent also criticized the tendency to 'waste' this fund on festivities and ceremonies, and pleaded for its use on socially productive projects and amenities to labour.[30]

So far, the planters and the Government, encouraged vigorously by the Indian Agent after 1924, were concerned with schemes to control and restrict the drinking of toddy by Indian labourers. In the 1930s there arose a popular prohibition movement, part of the reformist movement of this period. From 1928, the reports of the Indian Agent drew attention to this popular movement among articulate sections of Indian opinion. Sastri recommended progress towards prohibition in the estates. The planters opposed prohibition, because they thought it would only drive the labourer outside the estate for his drink. It was also feared that prohibition might increase the popularity of illegal brews like *samsu*, more potentially injurious to health. However, in two districts in Selangor, the Sultan prohibited the sale of liquor, and it was found that in these 'dry' areas the labourers led peaceful and healthy lives. The prohibition movement was a part of the political awakening of the times, but its weakness was that it was largely an urban and middle-class movement.

(iv) Agricultural Settlement

Schemes to settle Indian labourers on the land and make them part-time agriculturists were talked of for a long time before they actually got going. Indian critics of labour emigration were among the first to advocate that such migration should be coupled with schemes of systematic land colonization.[31] Planters had spoken about such schemes

[30] India, Agent of the Government of India, *Annual Report*, 1929.

[31] See speech by Mr. K. Ahmed in the Central Legislative Assembly in the debate on the Indian Emigration Act of 1922, cited in K. A. Neelakandha Aiyer, *Indian Problems in Malaya* (Kuala Lumpur, 1938), p. 106.

as a step towards the establishment of a permanent domiciled labour force. They wanted the Government to initiate colonization schemes on State land. But nothing could be done as long as the prevailing attitude was that Indian labourers in Malaya were birds of passage. There were other more concrete problems. The Government did not want to alienate any land for this purpose because all available land in western Malaya was being taken up by plantation agriculture. There was also the tricky issue of Malay Reservation Land, which had enormously expanded since the Act of 1913. The one major attempt at Indian land settlement in the pre-Depression period was started by some Catholic missionaries in 1884. This was at Bagan Serai in Perak State, where the early immigrants had worked. It began as a settlement for destitute Indians by the St. Joseph Mission. It was an area of 700 acres in which each family was given five acres as private property to plant paddy. The owners built their own houses, and paddy was their main crop. When they were free they would go to work in the neighbouring estates to supplement their income. The organizational nucleus provided by the mission ensured the successful continuance of this scheme.[32]

In older estates, such as in the Province Wellesley region, Indian labourers established contact with the traditional agricultural economy of neighbouring villages, and hired out their labour in the paddy fields. Estate labourers attempted some vegetable garden cultivation and cattle-rearing wherever land was available. Such interests came to them naturally as they had been agriculturists or agricultural labourers in their home villages. The estates frowned on such activity because of the sanitation problems caused by stagnant water and ill-kept cattle pens. The regulation of 1927 that one-sixteenth of an acre should be set aside on an estate for each labourer with a dependent family somewhat accelerated the trend towards an agricultural side-occupation for the labourer. But like many labour laws this was not strictly observed. Estates pleaded insufficiency of land, and

32 A brief history of this settlement is given in F.M.S., *Annual Report of the Labour Department*, 1937, p. 44.

when they did give land it was so far away from the labourer's home that he had no incentive to go to so much trouble to cultivate it. If he did take the land, he was reluctant to put anything into it because of the insecurity of his tenure, and because he did not want to tie himself down to employment in a particular estate.

The experience of the Depression in relation to labour was an eye-opener to both sides of the rubber industry, and indeed to Government. The danger of over-dependence of labourers on a wage economy was brought home dramatically. When many labourers were refused work or were given half-time work, they took to supplementing their incomes with make-shift cultivation, hunting, and fishing.[33] The number of labourers who refused repatriation but were prepared to carry on in this way until better times was enormous, and this opened the eyes of Government and the planters to the need for a more systematic diversion of the labourer's sources of income. The Labour Department sent out an important Circular to managers of estates in August 1931. The Circular drew the attention of planters to the provisions in the Labour Code concerning the allotment of land for each labourer on an estate. It reminded planters of their obligation to clear this land at their own expense near the labourers' quarters. With the reduction of labourers' earnings, such facilities had become very necessary to supplement their diet and earnings. In a tone of reproof, the Circular pointed out that if there had been many such allotments, so much repatriation need not have been carried out in 1930 and 1931.[34] The planters agreed with the necessity for action, and allotments sprang up everywhere. In Negri Sembilan some enlightened planters experimented with livestock and helped their labourers to improve their breeds of cattle. The Department of Agriculture published a brochure in Tamil on the cultivation of foodstuffs, and in estate schools this became part of the curriculum. Everywhere there was a move to send the Indian to the land.

In the wake of the Depression, a number of sponsored

[33] F.M.S., *Annual Report of the Labour Department*, 1931, p. 14.
[34] Ibid., pp. 10–11.

schemes of land settlement for Indians came into being. Only a few of these lasted for any considerable time. Some estates experimented with their own projects. On an estate in Negri Sembilan, a block of land was subdivided into two- or three-acre lots, and leased to labourers. On an estate in Morib sixty-three acres of land unsuitable for rubber were cleared. This land was divided into one-acre blocks and those labourers who could not find work and were dependent on their relatives, were encouraged to settle there. The settler had to build his own home, but the estate provided the roof of *attap*. Settlers bred livestock—goats, pigs, and chickens.[35]

Perhaps the most noteworthy of these attempts—one that lasted longest and in fact flourishes today—was the co-operative settlement at Sungei Chua in Negri Sembilan. Here, in June 1933, sixty-nine labourers formed themselves into a co-operative society and sought to develop 230 acres of land. These persons had been displaced from their jobs during the Depression. They were fortunate in possessing two able and energetic leaders who took the initiative in the whole project. They were assisted by the Indian Co-operative Officer of the District, and encouraged by the Indian Agent, who showed interest in the project. In 1932 they were given temporary licences to develop the land. The Health Department assisted them in keeping the place free of infectious diseases, and drains were dug under proper supervision. The Agricultural Officer helped with regard to crops and livestock. By 1937 most of the land had been developed, families had settled in, community services were established, and a temple and school were built. The colonists planted vegetables, sugar cane, fruit trees, tapioca, and sweet potatoes. Pig rearing was one of their most profitable ventures. The settlement flourished as a co-operative venture, managed to hold out under Japanese occupation, and carried on after the war.[36]

In all these ventures of land settlement, the State stood

[35] Ibid., 1937, pp. 42–7.

[36] Ibid., 1937, p. 44. For a contemporary study of this settlement, see R. K. Jain, 'The Ramanathapuram Experiment', *Proceedings of the International Conference Seminar of Tamil Studies* (Vol. I, Kuala Lumpur, 1968), pp. 164–96.

aside and gave indirect assistance. It expected the initiative to come from the planters or labourers. Those who advocated a more ambitious project of settlement were not satisfied with this. The Indian member of the Federal Council asked the Government on more than one occasion to initiate such schemes, but the Government was not prepared to do this. It was plain that the only chance for the success of Indian land colonization was the outright alienation of land with permanent titles to the cultivators. This could only be done by the State. The position taken up by Government was that under existing laws there was provision for Indians to apply for land through District and Land Officers, but that they had not taken advantage of this opportunity.[37] Sir George Maxwell, in a message to *The Indian*, the monthly organ of the Singapore Indian Association, gave expression to this view on his retirement as High Commissioner in 1932. Contrasting the relative lack of interest in land among Indians with the successful vegetable and garden cultivation of the Chinese, he asked Indian leaders to go into this question and find means of encouraging their compatriots to take to the land.[38]

It is interesting to speculate on the reasons for the differences in the Indian and Chinese response to land settlement. This is sometimes dismissed with the facile explanation that the Indians lacked enterprise and initiative, which the Chinese possessed in abundance. While it is not possible to confirm or deny such impressionistic assessments of entire communities, it may be pointed out that there were some external factors that might have produced these results. The life of the Indian was controlled and governed by the estate authorities, who for a long time would not part with any land on their estates for agriculture. The Chinese had a freer organization and an uncontrolled life, and could, if they were so disposed, establish squatter settlements. To get land through official channels was a tedious process, for which the Indian was not educationally equipped. The

[37] F.M.S., *Proceedings of the Federal Council*, 1928, B69, B73; ibid., 1930, B27–8, B32.

[38] *The Indian* (Vol. IV, no. 12, March–June, 1932).

penghulu (headman), who was the man on the spot and through whom the actual process of a land claim had to go, was liable to be most discouraging and uncooperative, given the Malay attitude to immigrant communities. For this reason the Indian member on the Federal Council asked for the appointment of a land colonization officer with these specific duties.[39] This was never done. The feeling among Indians was that the Government was merely paying lip-service to the idea of colonization because of the immediate needs caused by the Depression.

From 1928 the Co-operative movement was extended to the estates in order to induce the labourers to save. Estate Labourers' Co-operative Societies were organized. These were credit societies where labourers deposited monthly savings. They had the support of the Labour Department and the estate management, which provided for contributions to be deducted from wages. At first the response was poor. The labourer was suspicious of depositing money with this remote and impersonal body. Managers allegedly used some compulsion to get labourers to contribute. But the habit gradually caught on. There was a setback during the Depression when some societies were liquidated, but after the Depression the movement expanded. By 1937 there were seventy such societies in the Straits Settlements, with a capital of 356,091 Dollars, and in the F.M.S. there were 243 societies with a capital of 1,178,036 Dollars.[40] By 1940 the total capital of all these societies had increased to 2,658,876 Dollars.[41] The labourer had other informal ways of saving, in which he had more confidence. The most popular of these was the *koottu* or chit-fund method. These *koottus* were organized by *kanganys* whose prestige gave the labourers confidence in the system.

The existence of various methods of saving does not mean, however, that labourers as a community were living on a surplus budget. Labour indebtedness was quite heavy and, at the same time as he was sending remittances to India or

[39] F.M.S., *Proceedings of the Federal Council*, 1930, B38.
[40] F.M.S., *Annual Report of the Labour Department*, 1937, p. 33.
[41] Ibid., 1940, p. 7.

making his contribution to the Co-operative Society, the labourer was borrowing money for his living. This took the form of loans at high rates of interest from the estate shop-keepers, or professional moneylenders and pawn-brokers. The Planters' Association in Malacca attempted to make a survey of this and found that labourers in the one district surveyed were heavily indebted. The survey was not proceeded with further. It may be presumed that those with dependants in India to whom they were making periodic remittances suffered most.

(v) Labour Unrest

Organizations and activity among labourers themselves for their own betterment were very slow in developing. The paternalism of the Labour Department, the estate manager, and the Indian Agent hindered any such growth. Even when associations or groupings were formed these were purely friendly societies looking after aspects of welfare, and largely with non-labour leadership. They were formed on a caste basis or a territorial basis, i.e. people who had migrated from a village or district in India. Unlike the case of Chinese societies, some of which also began as kin groups, these never widened their functions to include betterment of service conditions and employment.

But it must not be assumed that the Indian labourer, right up to the Second World War, never took any action affecting his terms of service. There are recorded instances of disturbances and even of strikes on estates and, more frequently, among urban labourers. It must be admitted that most of these came under the category of internecine social disputes. The labourers were by no means a homogeneous body. Differences among them, combined with the fact that they lived and worked together with more points of contact than they would have had at home, produced social tensions. Caste disputes causing disturbances on estates have already been noted. Then there were ethnic differences: the Tamil and Thelugu labour force in an estate would sometimes clash. An unpopular *kangany* was quite often the cause of labour disturbances. The *kanganys* were for long

the recognized leaders of Indian labour, and also its recognized exploiters. Though their privileges in Malaya were considerably less than in Ceylon, they still had ways of keeping a hold on their labourers. Sometimes *kanganys* who quarrelled with the management would use their influence among the labourers to incite them to riot or strike. Differences with the Indian sub-managerial officers were another cause of labour troubles. As the period advanced, labourers became touchy about being bossed by these Indian officers. In the 1930s there were several incidents caused by bad relations between them and the labourers. When there were ethnic differences between labourers and the officers, misunderstandings were more frequent. Many of the Asian estate staff officers in these years were Malayalees and Ceylon Tamils, with whom the labourers had no sympathy or attachment. There is one serious instance of a racial clash between Indian and Chinese labourers employed at the Perak River Hydro-Electric Company's work site at Chendorah in 1927.[42]

Joint action by Indian labourers specifically for the betterment of their conditions is seen first among workers in private industry and in Government departments such as Railway Workshops and Public Works. Among the first recorded strikes by Indian workers was the one at Caxton Press in 1927. The employers took the strikers to court, and won a judgement against them.[43] In the following year, Indian workmen of the Central Workshop of the F.M.S. Railways presented some demands to the authorities with a strike threat. A conciliation committee was appointed, and the issues were settled with the assistance of the Indian Agent.[44] This embryonic tendency towards industrial action was set back by the Depression. After the Depression, with the resumption of normal wages and employment conditions, labourers showed that they had been chastened and hardened by the experience. The Controller of Labour noted in 1937

[42] All instances of labour troubles drawn from *Annual Reports of the Labour Department*, 1913–40.

[43] *Annual Report of the Labour Department*, 1927, p. 10.

[44] Ibid., 1928, p. 9.

that the modern Indian labourer knew his rights and how to set about getting them as well as the Chinese. 'The old-fashioned Indian coolie who accepted everything as a matter of course is now rapidly disappearing. The labourer now does not stand in awe of the *kangany*, clerk or conductor, or stand helpless against authority.'[45]

Inter-caste disputes were less frequent in occurrence, and caste distinctions on the estates tended to be reduced. The workers of the years just prior to the Japanese invasion were aware of the contents of the Labour Code through the Tamil abstracts, and knew of the workings of the Workmen's Compensation Act and of various benefits due to them from their employers. It was said that they followed with interest reports in the Tamil press of cases under the Workmen's Compensation Act. Disturbances and strikes on estates were now caused by industrial disputes rather than factional social quarrels.

Indian stevedore and godown workers in the Penang harbour were particularly restless and active from 1937. They carried out a number of minor strikes and were able to improve their wages and conditions. This unrest continued till 1940 because conditions on the Penang waterfront were deplorable.[46] Strikes by cigar rollers and by workers in the Petroleum Company were all settled in 1937 with increased pay. For the first time, in 1937, agitators from outside were seen going onto estates and inciting workers to strike. One such instance is recorded on a Negri Sembilan estate where a Labour Union established in Kuala Lumpur employed a Tamil agitator to provoke the workers. This appears to be the first instance of the communist type of incitement of industrial unrest which was later to become the *modus operandi* of the communist general labour unions.[47] Strikes on estates were generally followed by the workers presenting a petition of demands. These demands generally related to such industrial matters as overtime payment, calculation of wage rates based on cost of living, and the like—a feature which shows

[45] Ibid., 1937, p. 69.
[46] Ibid., 1937, p. 50; ibid., 1939, p. 2; ibid., 1940, p. 8.
[47] Ibid., 1937, p. 50.

a higher level of leadership and understanding of problems.

In 1941 there was serious unrest on the estates in Klang district, largely caused by young radical and nationalist agitators and labour leaders who looked upon their struggle as not merely industrial but also as a political struggle against British imperialism. The army had to be brought in to restore order. The British disingenuously used Indian troops to fire on strikers, creating bad feelings among Indians.[48]

Wherever Indian labour was employed with Chinese labour, the former acquired some of the industrial militancy of the latter, and they soon started working together in multi-racial organizations. The most famous of these joint actions was the Batu Arang Colliery workers strike in 1937 which assumed enormous proportions, and Indian workers held out with Chinese workers for a long time. On the Penang water front, Indian and Chinese labour had co-operated with good results, as also in the Central Railway Workshop. In Singapore, Indian and Chinese workers in the Singapore Traction Company and the cargo workers of Tanjong Pagar Labour Company jointly struck work in 1938.

In Singapore the Indian was more prepared to shed his communal separateness, and work with the Chinese for the betterment of his lot. At the time of the Japanese invasion the image of the Indian labourer all over Malaya had considerably changed. He was now a more self-confident, self-assertive individual. Even his appearance and social habits had changed. The process of modernization had begun, more rapidly among urban workers, less so, yet markedly, among plantation workers. The one weakness was the inability to organize in a disciplined and effective manner. With the wave of industrial unrest in the country after 1937, the Government passed the Trade Union Ordinance in 1940 with a view to promoting the growth of responsible united bodies that could effectively represent the workers. There were a number of Chinese societies that sought to register as trade unions, but there was no corresponding move among Indian workers.[49] The Indian labourer

[48] Gamba, op. cit., p. 14.

[49] F.M.S., *Annual Report of the Labour Department*, 1940, p. 9.

had achieved individual emancipation but Indian society had not been similarly emancipated.

Commercial, Professional, and Other Groups

(i) Political Activity

The Indian educated and commercial classes looked upon themselves as more permanent residents of Malaya than did the labouring classes. They were more disposed (and had the wherewithal) to plant permanent institutions, acquire property, and acclimatize themselves generally. No doubt they too had their problems in the process. The pull of the motherland has been as strong among them as it was among the labourers. But they had better means to reproduce an Indian cultural environment in Malaya, and set about this in the course of the twentieth century. The fact that these middle-class migrants came with their families made this process easier, though it should immediately be noted that this was not so among the Chettyar, or among many shop-keepers, shop assistants, and hawkers. The Chettyar, wherever they went, were able to have a dual locality, establishing institutions and owning property in their country of migration while retaining their permanent residences in their ancestral village. The professional classes and North Indian mercantile groups generally accepted the fact that they had come to settle, however difficult the adjustment may have been. Yet it is not without significance that even some educated Indian families that have lived in Malaya for over a generation, and taken a full part in the country's social and political life, have repatriated at the end of their careers.

Right down to the 1930s, the Indian middle class of Malaya grew isolated from the movements and ideologies that were influencing their counterparts in India. This was partly because of the physical difficulty of communications, but also the result of Malayan Government policy. It appears that the Government was wary of any nationalist and liberal propaganda coming from India. It vetted literature and screened visitors coming from India. Even in the large towns and cities, Indians had little or no contact

with the educated classes of other communities. All this was aptly expressed by an intelligent Malayan Indian observer when he wrote in 1932 that the general outlook of the average Indian in Malaya was narrow and superficial; he lacked a distant view, was lethargic and apathetic even to his own welfare.[50] Though this very critical judgement is by all evidence incontrovertible, it can be historically understood and explained. Indian middle-class communities came in a trickle, dispersed to various towns and offices, and were soon submerged in a flood of urban dwellers of various communities. It is not surprising that they took a long time to find their feet and establish contacts with other members of their community and with other races.

The search for unity with their compatriots soon began, and gave rise to the first crop of movements in the community. These were the Indian Associations, which were formed in all towns and districts where educated Indians were concentrated. The first of these was the Indian Association of Taiping, formed in April 1906. A few years later, in 1909, a similar association, the Selangor Indian Association, was formed at Kuala Lumpur with powerful backing from Indian businessmen, professionals, and clerical workers in Federal Government Offices. Soon other associations were formed, such as the Kinta Indian Association in Ipoh, the Lower Perak Indian Association in Telok Anson, the Coastal Indian Association in Klang, the Indian Association in Penang, the Malacca Indian Association, and the Negri Sembilan Indian Association. The Singapore Indian Association was formed in 1923. The membership and activities of these associations were broadly similar. Businessmen and successful professionals, such as lawyers, doctors, and surveyors, financed and gave leadership to these bodies. Support came from a wide range of educated groups: Indian priests of various Christian missions, schoolmasters, Government officers and clerks, and officers in private firms and on the plantations.

In the early phase of their existence, their activities were

[50] B. K. Chengappa, 'Where we fail', *The Selangor Indian* (Vol. I, no. 1, January 1932), p. 7f.

limited to providing a social nucleus for the community in each district. They paid much attention to providing recreational facilities for their members. Social gatherings were arranged on Indian festival days. They were very loyal to the British régime. With such a large membership from Government employees they could not be otherwise. Government honours were fervently sought after and eagerly celebrated, and British civil servants were lavishly fêted and presented with petitions of loyalty. The leading Indian in an urban community was sometimes appointed to a Sanitary Board or a Municipal Board or a Hospital Advisory Committee. To be so selected was considered highly prestigious, and the association celebrated this event. The Singapore Indian Association, with strong financial backing from the Indian business community, published from 1925 a monthly journal called *The Indian*, where it printed news concerning the activities of Indian Associations in all parts of Malaya. From 1932 *The Selangor Indian* was published by the Selangor Indian Association.

Though such associations were soon formed all over the country, very few of them had any fruitful existence. In fact many declined soon after their birth and died slowly. Others, even such sturdy ones as the Selangor and Singapore Associations, had long periods of lifelessness. This was due partly to apathy and partly to factionalism. It soon became clear that one could catch the eye of the British authorities by activity in these associations, and be nominated to various Boards and Councils. So sometimes rival associations would crop up, as in Penang. When one group was entrenched in power in an Association for some time, opposition to it would grow, and the Association would become the scene of an unseemly quarrel between two groups. Or sometimes there would be such apathy among members that one or two individuals would have to bear the brunt of the Association's responsibilities. By the 1930s many of these Associations existed only on paper, and even the others had made no strong impact on the community. Those that were alive were just good clubs. They had not brought about any significant awakening or consciousness in the Indian

community. Perhaps the period when they operated was too early for such developments. This sense of failure was prevalent among perceptive members of the community, and from the early 1930s there were attempts to inquire into and remedy shortcomings.[51]

From very early on, Indian educated groups were concerned with the question of representation in the various Legislative Councils of the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States. Gradually these Councils were being enlarged by the appointment of more unofficial members, who were chosen to represent diverse interests and communities. When the authorities thought of Indian interests in Malaya, for a long time they thought exclusively in terms of Indian labour, and this was held to be adequately looked after by the Controller of Labour in the highest Councils of the country. The question of an Indian member in these Councils did not arise until the Indian Associations began to show some signs of activity. The first break-through came in the Straits Settlements when Mr. P. K. Nambyar, a barrister practising in Penang, was appointed to the Legislative Council in 1923. Progress towards such recognition in the F.M.S. was slower because of complications caused by relations with the Sultanates and policy towards indigenous interests.

Indian Associations had not become effective organizers of Indian opinion in any of the States. What could have become the most powerful among them, the Selangor Indian Association, was defunct for a time and was even served with a notification by the Registrar of Societies in the F.M.S. Government Gazette in 1917 asking for proof of its existence. It reorganized itself after the war and used the occasion of the appointment of an Indian to the S.S. Legislative Council to press for similar representation in the Federal Council. In 1923 it sponsored a representative meeting of Indians from many parts of the F.M.S. and

[51] For examples of such self-criticism, see Govinda Krishna, 'Indian Associations and their Duty', *The Indian* (Vol. I, no. 4, July 1925); D. W. Devaraja, 'Indian Associations in Penang', *The Indian* (Vol. I, no. 6, September 1926); 'A Federation of Indian Associations in Malaya', *The Selangor Indian* (Vol. I, no. 2, April 1932), p. 10.

presented a petition to the Governor. The Governor, Sir Lawrence Guillemard, received a deputation of Indians, and promised sympathetic consideration of the request for representation. It was only in 1928 that the Government decided to appoint an Indian to the Federal Council. Mr. S. N. Veerasamy, a practising lawyer from Kuala Lumpur, was nominated. Soon the State Councils followed suit, and the same member was appointed to the Selangor State Council. In 1929, Mr. Louis Thivy, a proprietory planter from Perak, was appointed to the Council of that State. In 1932 Dr. S. R. Krishnan was appointed to the Negri Sembilan Council.

The Government and the Indian community did not see eye to eye on the nature of Indian representation. When the High Commissioner announced the appointment of Veerasamy as Indian member of the Federal Council, he made the point that he was being selected to represent Hindu interests. He said that the Hindus, who constituted a vast majority of Indians in Malaya, had become an important community in this country. He also went on to say that as a great majority of Ceylonese settled in Malaya were also Hindus, the Government reserved the right to appoint a Ceylonese to this position.[52] It appears to have been the Government's intention to divest the newly-appointed member of any claim to represent the Indian community as a whole, and correspondingly to disillusion the Indian community of any belief that they were represented as a community on the Council. The Indians saw in this move an attempt to divide the community on religious grounds. With the knowledge of the experience in India of communalism and separatism before them, they disclaimed any desire for separate representation of sub-groups among Indians.[53] It was a most ill-advised move on the part of the Government, especially as Hindus and Muslims were working harmoniously through Indian Associations and other public bodies. There was also no consistency in this policy, because a few years later Indian Muslims and Christians were appointed to various Councils to fill vacant Indian seats.

[52] F.M.S., *Proceedings of the Federal Council*, 1928, B2.
[53] Editorial, *The Indian* (Vol. III, no. 12, March 1928).

The other factor that caused dissatisfaction was the inclusion of Ceylonese within the scope of interests represented by the Indian member, and the assertion that a Ceylonese could be chosen to fill this seat. Tension between the Indian and Ceylonese middle class had been growing for some time. After some initial attempts at working together in common organizations, the two communities had mutually decided to separate and go their own ways. Ceylonese had a feeling of superiority over the Indians because their community in Malaya was almost exclusively a middle-class, white-collar community.[54] So they were able to found organizations that were more efficient and more effective. Being a small community, they were well-knit and did not present problems of organization like the Indians. The issue of representation, posed in this way by the Government, widened the distance between the two communities. Tussles for nomination between leaders of the two communities occurred at all levels from the lowest District and Rural Boards to the highest Councils, exacerbating personal relations between them. In states like Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan, and Johore, Ceylonese were appointed to State Councils, and the numerically larger Indian community, having thus lost all representation on these Councils, nursed a justifiable grievance. Srinivasa Sastri noted this Indo-Ceylonese ill-feeling on his visit to Malaya, and deplored it in his report.

The presence of an Indian member on the Federal Council and the S.S. Legislature did serve to highlight some of the problems Indian leaders were most concerned with in this period. There was some attempt to talk on questions concerning Indian labour. Alcoholism among labourers, the problem of Hindu marriages and their registration, the minimum wage and its extensive application, land colonization for labourers—these were some of the problems of labour on which Indian members made comments and asked questions. But it must be admitted that their interventions were not very effective. They did not show full

[54] For a comment on Ceylonese aloofness, see Editorial, *The Indian* (Vol. II, no. 4, July 1926).

knowledge of the matters they were talking about. The Indian middle class at this time did not take much trouble to understand the problems of Indian labour. In fact there was a self-conscious attempt to stand aloof from these people, to show the other communities of Malaya that they were different and could not be tainted with the same 'coolie' brush. These people would use the work 'coolie' in the same derogatory sense as the European in Malaya.

The Indian member on the Federal Council was more articulate on matters which affected the Indian middle class. He made repeated interventions on the treatment of Asian patients in the paying wards of Kuala Lumpur Government Hospital, and on the issue of retrenchment during the Depression. He charged that there was discrimination against non-Malays in operating retrenchment in Government Offices. He was concerned with the provision of places in English schools for Indian children. Finally, both he and the member in the S.S. Legislature repeatedly raised the question of the admission of Indians into the administrative, technical, and civil services.[55]

This question of equal opportunities for employment was bound up with the wider issue of political and civil status that now became increasingly the concern of Indian educated classes, as it was of their Chinese counterparts. As more of their number decided to settle in the country, had children who were born there, and had cut off all contacts with their country of origin, they began to reflect on their future prospects. What did the country hold in store for them and their descendents? Did their children have an established status in their country of adoption? These questions had been immediately provoked by the decentralization proposals and consequent administrative changes. They were underlined more starkly by the brutal facts of the Depression. Soon after the decentralization proposals were announced, the Imperial Government sent Sir Samuel Wilson, the Colonial Under-Secretary, to visit Malaya and discuss these proposals with various interests there. A deputation of

[55] F.M.S., *Proceedings of the Federal Council*, 1933, B146, B60, B95; ibid., 1934, B104; ibid., 1936, B14; ibid., 1937, B41.

leaders of non-Malay communities led by Veerasamy, the Indian member in the Federal Council, met Sir Samuel Wilson. Wilson said of this interview in his report of 1932 that they 'left me under no illusion as to the anxiety they feel over proposals to transfer considerable power from Federal to State Governments'.[56] Indians were worried that the transfer of greater powers to the states would lead to the erosion of their prosperity and the little influence they enjoyed in governmental matters. They feared that they would henceforth be discriminated against in Government employment, the mainstay of the middle class. Already the progress of English education among Malays, and their increasing availability for employment in sectors popular with Indians and Ceylonese, had affected these two communities. They feared that their own meagre educational facilities would be further curtailed, as would the little representation they had on Councils and public bodies. In short, they feared that an accelerated move towards a pro-Malay policy might result from decentralization, and this would vitally affect the interests of their community.

Even Indian business interests expressed their fears of decentralization. The Chettyar Chamber of Commerce put these down in their memorandum to Sir Samuel Wilson. They said that they had invested a lot of money in the Federated States, and did a great deal of business under the protection of the Federal authority. They feared that a loosening of the powers of the Federation might impair the financial and business position of the states, and that there would be a decline in the value of property in Kuala Lumpur, where they had extensive investments, when government offices were dispersed. They also feared a decline in the value of property in the states.[57] So for different reasons both the educated classes and the business groups viewed with alarm their future under the proposed decentralization.

As far as the British Government and the Malay States were concerned, these considerations were not important

[56] *Report of Brigadier-General Sir Samuel Wilson . . . on his visit to Malaya*, 1932, Cmd. 4276, p. 26.

[57] *The Indian* (Vol. V, no. 2, August–September 1932).

enough to change a policy that had already been decided on. Sir Samuel Wilson merely noted their views and said that non-Malay communities should be given an assurance that their interests would not suffer under decentralization. He also said that it was the policy of the Government to accord full recognition to their status as British subjects (in the Straits Settlements) and British protected persons (in the Federated States).[58]

One of the concrete issues involving the status of domiciled Indians was admission to the administrative and technical services. In both the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States these services were exclusively British until a Malay Administrative Service was opened in the F.M.S. for Malays. Indian representatives, basing their arguments on the situation in India, where the principle of open competition was declared in 1858, pressed for admission into these services. In the S.S., a local civil service was started in 1932, for which all domiciled youths were eligible. This was the signal for renewed demands in the F.M.S. Dr. S. R. Krishnan, the Indian member of the Federal Council, asked in October 1934 that a proportion of posts in the Malay Administrative Service be set apart for non-Malays. The Government replied in the negative. They promised concessions in the Malayan Medical Service and in the technical services, but would not consider the admission of Indians to the Malay Administrative Service.[59] The Government was up against the problem of nationality. The Indian in the S.S. was a British subject, and could be granted the rights and privileges of a British subject. In the Malay States, no non-Malay could become a citizen. However long he was domiciled there he remained only a British protected person, and could not demand equal treatment with Malay subjects of the Sultan. Mr. Veerasamy argued in the Federal Council in February 1936 that those born in the territories of a Sultan's state should be declared subjects of the Sultan.[60] But the British could not force changes in the traditional

[58] *Report of Samuel Wilson*, op. cit., p. 26.
[59] F.M.S., *Proceedings of the Federal Council*, 1934, B104.
[60] Ibid., 1936, B14.

constitutional practices of the Malay Sultanates. The High Commissioner ended the argument with the reply: 'I could not support the proposal for the appointment of non-Malays to posts in the Federation. I know of no country . . . that appoints a foreigner, i.e. a native not of the race of the country or a non-Englishman, to an administrative post.'[61] It must have come as a surprise to many who had no ties with India to be referred to as foreigners in a country which was the only one they had been brought up to know.

The Depression caused severe hardship among the Indian educated classes. The large number who were dependent on Government employment were under the constant threat of retrenchment. There were a number of Indians in government offices in the lower grades of clerical employment, and a good many of them came under the axe of retrenchment. Indians generally felt that they were being discriminated against, and the Indian member expressed this sentiment in the Federal Council.[62] The dismissal of these people caused a great deal of hardship. Unemployment Relief Committees were set up all over the country, and through these the more affluent Indians helped their unfortunate compatriots. In Kuala Lumpur, the city most affected, an Unemployment Committee was set up by the Selangor Indian Association. Money was collected and passage money given to those wishing to be repatriated. Even after the Depression, unemployment among educated Indians continued because of the influx of educated Indians after immigration was resumed in 1934. The Federal Council appointed a committee to inquire into unemployment in Selangor. The Committee reported in April 1937.[63] One of the suggestions considered by this Committee was to prohibit educated immigrants from India, Ceylon, and China. This was rejected because of the adverse effect it would have on labour migration, and the reactions in India to such a ban. The Depression also caused curtailment in government spending

[61] Ibid., 1936, B18.
[62] Ibid., 1933, B60.
[63] F.M.S., *Report of the Selangor Unemployment Enquiry Committee, Proceedings of the Federal Council*, 1938, C69–73.

on education. Indian children found it difficult to find places in schools, and the raising of school fees in 1933 caused hardship to Indian parents. All these difficulties brought Indians together, fostered a co-operative spirit among them, and encouraged practical schemes of mutual assistance and self-help.

(ii) The Impact of the Commercial Groups

The Indian commercial classes had interests somewhat different from those of the professional and Government-employed groups, though they supported them in social activities and communal associations. The Chettyar were among the pioneer Indian commercialists, but soon there came equally powerful North Indian wholesale and retail merchants and controllers of agency houses. North Indian merchants were quite strong in Singapore, South Indian Muslims in Penang, and Chettyar in Kuala Lumpur and many other smaller towns. The Chettyar soon organized themselves into Chambers of Commerce on a regional basis in all places where they were concentrated, with a central Chamber for the entire F.M.S. in Kuala Lumpur. The North Indians in Singapore had a strong Indian Chamber of Commerce. There was another Indian Chamber of Commerce established at Penang. This multiplicity of Chambers performing the same sort of function did not tell for efficiency or effectiveness. The mercantile class did not have any deep social impact either within the Indian community or in the wider society in which they lived.

However, among the Indian commercial groups, the Chettyar had the widest impact on the country, because of the nature and range of their activities. They came to Malaya primarily as money-lenders. Their money-lending activities brought them in contact with the economy of the country and, as in Burma, released a process of change affecting many classes of people. They provided credit to people of various groups—European entrepreneurs, Chinese speculators, Indian hawkers and pedlars, and Malay royalty and peasants. The Government was aware of the function they were performing, and the Chief Secretary made

favourable references to the Chettyar and defended them against criticism in the Federal Council in 1923.[64] It was their relations with Malay peasants and small-holders that attracted the greatest attention in this period. From the early days Chettyar firms opened branches in rural townships from where they could draw on a large clientele in search of credit. They lent money to Malay peasants and landowners in return for the mortgage of their property and the deposit of their land titles. By this process they extended their activities not only in the four Federated States but even in the Unfederated States of Kedah and Johore. An inevitable consequence of such extensive lending was that land gradually passed into Chettyar hands by the forfeiture of mortgages. Some attempts were made by those aware of the unhealthy long-term consequences of this process for legislation prohibiting the sale of lands mortgaged for debts.[65] These were not successful because of the absence of Government support. The Government continued to look upon the Chettyar as providers of credit and therefore a favourable influence on the economy. The gradual extension from 1913 of Malay reservations, in which no non-Malay could own property, somewhat restricted Chettyar loan dealings with the Malay peasants. But this was evaded by using a nominee to hold land in the Malay reservation on behalf of the moneylender.

The Depression brought problems connected with moneylending to a head. Peasant proprietors and small-holders were heavily indebted to Chettyar, who began selling the secured land. This reduced many Malay families to landlessness. The Sultan of Perak, the State most affected, was deeply concerned, and instructed the British Resident in October 1930 to go into the question and consider the feasibility of legislation as a remedy. The Resident reported that many villages were affected, and that Chettyar were using the opportunity to take over land at bottom value.[66] The Small Holdings (Restriction of Sale) Bill was announced

[64] F.M.S., *Proceedings of the Federal Council*, 1923, B31.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid., 1931, B17–18.

in 1931. According to its provisions, no order of sale of country land not exceeding twenty-five acres, whether in execution of a decree or on application of foreclosure of a charge, was to be carried out without the consent of the Ruler-in-Council of the state where the land was situated.[67] Chettyar interests all over the country protested loudly. They claimed that their vast investments were in danger, that they would lose all the money they had given out in loans, and that their Malay debtors would now be encouraged to refuse repayment of loans and might even stop payment of the interest due. It was revealed in the course of these exchanges that Chettyar had loaned 125 million Dollars to small-holders in the F.M.S. on security. The Government decided that Chettyar fears were not unreasonable and amended the Bill, providing as a condition of any refusal of consent or postponement of sale that 75 per cent of the interest should be paid.[68] Apart from this the Government made no concession. The Chief Secretary was firm in his view that the Act would be the first effective step taken by the Government to try and get the peasant proprietor out of the hands of the Indian money-lender.[69]

This was followed by the Malay Reservations Act of 1933, the effect of which was to further ensure land in Malay reservations against sale for escheat. Its aim was to prevent proprietors in Malay reservations from being encumbered with a burden of debt they could not get rid of except by the sale of their land. The Act provided that no Malay holding was to be transferred, charged, leased, or otherwise disposed to any non-Malay. Here again Chettyar interests were affected, and they petitioned the Government. Although under the Malay Reservations Act of 1913 Malay reservation land was protected in many ways, Chettyar money-lenders had secured control of some of this land through various means not in keeping with the spirit of the Act. Loan transactions had been entered into on the security of land in the reservations. The Government held that all these transactions were illegal, and that any losses incurred by the Chettyar were their own responsibility. The Chettyar

[67] Ibid., B16–17. [68] Ibid., B20. [69] Ibid.

protested, without avail, that existing loans should be safeguarded from the provisions of the Act.[70]

These events brought a lot of unwelcome attention on the Chettyar community, who were held up before the public eye as extortionate and heartless exploiters of the poor. It is significant that other Indian groups did not come to the support of the Chettyar in their struggle against these acts. The Chettyar were generally an introvert group, separatist in outlook, having their own exclusive organizations and religious institutions, and leading an isolated social life. They had not mixed well or integrated with other groups, and this partly explains their isolation on this issue.[71] The Indian member on the Federal Council made virtually no contribution in the discussions of these Bills, but voted in favour of them and against all motions to amend clauses to suit Chettyar interests. It is significant that the two Chinese members of Council supported the Chettyar, and the most strenuous fight on their behalf was put up by Mr. E. D. Shearn, an unofficial European member. The Chettyar seem to have presented their case through him rather than through the Indian member.[72] These members may have supported the Chettyar on this issue because they were opposed to the principle of Government interference in economic transactions between individuals.

Another measure curbing Chettyar activities came in 1935 when the Money-lenders' Ordinance was passed by the S.S. Legislature. The Act regulated the business of money-lending. Memoranda of loans were to be given, and the courts had power to open up transactions which were considered harsh and unconscionable. Again the Chettyar put up a spirited protest. They held that under the new rules they could not carry on their business in peace, and that it was tantamount to asking them to pack up and leave.[73] This was of course an exaggerated statement of the position, and there was no big pull-out of Chettyar firms after the passing of the Act.

[70] Ibid., 1933, B132, 161.

[71] For a contemporary statement of this view, see M. N. Nair, op. cit., p. 44.

[72] See debates on the Act, *Proceedings of the Federal Council*, 1933, B132, 161–4.

[73] For the views of the Nattukottai Chettyar Chamber of Commerce on the announcement of the Bill, see *The Indian* (Vol. IV, no. 12, March–June 1932).

During this period Indian ownership of land in Malaya increased steadily. By far the greatest share of this was in the hands of Chettyar. From the 1920s they had started investing in rubber. There was also a small number of other Indian landowners, mainly retired government servants or businessmen, who also invested in rubber. A large amount of land fell into Chettyar hands by the foreclosure of mortgage. The process was accelerated during the Depression and was only halted by the legislation outlined above. The steady growth of Indian ownership and control of land in the F.M.S. is illustrated by the following figures.

TABLE 2. F.M.S. LAND OWNED AND HELD IN MORTGAGE BY INDIANS (ACRES)

Year	*Perak*		*Selangor*		*Negri Sembilan*		*Pahang*	
	owned	mortgage	owned	mortgage	owned	mortgage	owned	mortgage
1919	18,506	23,641	[not available]	11,872	7,835	23,724	[not available]	10,033
1928	48,680	30,816	27,081	12,523	17,154	11,243	8,766	20,456
1938	69,632	28,872	40,100	10,271	28,000	10,483	15,111	16,344

Source: Proceedings of the Federal Council, 1939, B33.

Indian ownership of rubber estates stood at 87,795 acres in 1938, representing 4 per cent of the total acreage under rubber.[74] Again Chettyar ownership accounted for the greater part of this. Indian estates were mostly in the 100–1,000 acre category. There was a general complaint in this period from the Labour Department over the treatment of labour, and the carrying out of the obligations under the Labour Code in Asian-owned estates.

Chettyar were the first to open Indian banks in Malaya. From 1935 they had two banks, the Chettinad Bank and the Bank of Chettinad, which opened branches in Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, and some smaller towns. These banks did not do banking business but were given licences to maintain places of business solely for purpose of contracts. The first major Indian bank to open business was the Indian Overseas Bank in Kuala Lumpur in 1937.

(iii) The Central Indian Association of Malaya

From the early 1920s there had been talk of welding these disparate Indian groups into some single united organization.

[74] *Malayan Year Book*, 1930.

A writer in *The Indian* in December 1925 spoke prophetically of the need for a Malayan Indian Congress.[75] But such an idea was premature both from the point of view of Indian preparedness and the British official attitude. Indian leaders thought more of annual conferences of Indian Associations to study and comment on Indian problems. After a few such conferences the question of a permanent association for all Malaya was mooted. On the initiative of the Selangor Indian Association, the First Annual Conference was held in 1928. These conferences discussed matters of interest to all sections of Indians, including many problems of labour such as wages, land settlement, repatriation, and toddy control. Problems common to Indians in Malaya were considered and resolutions passed. These included the registration of Hindu marriages, Indian education, representation on Councils and public bodies, employment and unemployment, and measures to promote unity. The absence of a permanent body to give effect to the decisions of a conference and follow matters through with sustained interest was a major organizational defect. But the existence of a common platform and a common meeting ground for Indians from all parts of the country was a step forward.

This new-found unity and enthusiasm gave rise to some radical opinion, a strange innovation in a community that had so far not strayed from the strait and narrow path of loyalty and indeed subservience. Radical views were held among those educated Indians who thought that a firmer link should be forged between the middle class and labour, and that the former should come out more forcefully as champions of the latter. This was the earliest sign of contamination of nationalistic feelings among sections of the Malayan Indian intelligentsia. The idea that the middle class were the natural leaders of the Indian working class and peasantry against the alien imperialists on the basis of ethnic identification had long been the hallmark of Indian nationalism. We now see the beginnings of the spread of such feelings in Malaya. Increasingly, Malayan Indian leaders gave expression to strong views on the exploitation

[75] *The Indian* (Vol. I, no. 9, December 1925).

of Indian labour. At the Fourth Annual Conference of Indian Associations held in Ipoh in April 1931, the President, Dr. N. K. Menon, made a radical speech condemning the way in which Indian labour was being treated, and alleged that the labourer was being grossly exploited by the European capitalist. The speech seems to have created a stir both among Indians as well as among European business interests.[76] The *Straits Times*, the most influential daily in Malaya, condemned the speech as contrary to the tradition of Malayan politics, which were characterized by moderation and restraint, and contrasted this with the extremism and polemics which it held were the features of nationalist politics in India. It added the hope that such politics would not be imported into this country, and mar the good relations that existed between communities and individuals.[77] The speech, and the reaction it provoked from unofficial European circles, appear to have frightened many Indians into withdrawing their support from the Annual Conferences. The conferences were not held after this date and ceased to be a platform for Malayan Indian opinion. The new-born radicalism was thus temporarily scotched.

Even while the conferences were meeting, the idea was floated of a Federation of Indian Associations. This had the advantage of keeping the existing Indian Associations functioning, while establishing a loose but permanent bond between them. After the break-up of the Annual Conference, this project lay in abeyance for some time. In 1937 it was revived on the initiative of some leaders who had been active in the Annual Conferences. Perhaps the visit of Pandit Nehru to Malaya had some influence on these events. A Central Indian Association of Malaya was formed, with Dr. A. M. Soosay as its President. Membership of the new body was limited to constituent units consisting of sixteen existing organizations. Twelve of these were Indian Associations in different parts of Malaya, and four were Indian Chambers of Commerce and Merchants' Associations. Each

[76] A. V. Moothedeen, *Our Countrymen in Malaya* (Trivandrum, 1932), pp. 49–50.

[77] Editorial, *Straits Times*, 6 October 1931.

constituent association had the right to nominate ten members to the C.I.A.M., giving it a total membership of 160. It was thus not a new body but one in which the existing societies were bound together in a permanent federal structure. As such, its strength and its weakness depended on the constituent associations, which were of variable quality: a year after the formation of the C.I.A.M., some of the associations were unable to fill their quota of ten members.[78]

The C.I.A.M. was kept together, however, and was engaged in some fruitful activity through the dedication of a few prominent leaders and the re-emergence of radicalism among the Malayan Indian intelligentsia after 1937. The C.I.A.M. was the first Indian organization which carried on political activity as one of its declared aims, and should thus be regarded as the first political party of Malayan Indians. The President, in his address to the first annual general meeting in March 1938, had to assure members not to be frightened at the mention of the word politics. He defined politics in Malaya as relating to administrative matters, and political activity should consist of presenting representations, resolutions, and memoranda as advice to the Government.[79]

The bid to assume the leadership of Indian labour was carried further through the limited organization of the C.I.A.M. Soon after its formation the Association submitted a memorandum on *Toddy in Malaya* to the Indian Agent, arguing the case for prohibition on estates.[80] It also concerned itself with the wages question, which was then an issue of contention between the Malayan planters and the Government of India. In January 1938, the planters were discussing the likelihood of a reduction in wages because of the operation of the International Agreement regulating the production of rubber. Some employers made unilateral wage-cuts. The C.I.A.M. took a serious view of this, and in March 1938 sent a telegram to the Government of India. It stated that

[78] C.I.A.M., *Speech delivered by Dr. A. M. Soosay at the First Annual General Meeting of the Association held at Kuala Lumpur on 27 March 1938* (Kuala Lumpur, 1938) p. 2.

[79] Ibid., p. 4.

[80] C.I.A.M., op. cit.

the reduction of wages of Indian labour was imminent, and that this would seriously affect their living standards. It asked the Government of India to stop assisted emigration pending the settlement of these issues. It concluded: 'We respectfully urge Government of India to take up a determined and firm stand and safeguard Indian rights.'[81] In June the Indian Government imposed a ban on assisted emigration to Malaya. It is reasonable to assume that the stand of the C.I.A.M. helped to persuade the Government of India to impose its ban.

At this time we see the beginnings of an issue which has troubled the Indian intelligentsia since and caused some ambivalence in the attitudes of the Malayan Indian. It concerns the extent of his orientation and loyalty to his new homeland as compared to India. This question of dual loyalty has continued to trouble him, and has its effects in shaping his political attitude as well as his cultural expression. The beginning of an attempt to divide the community between 'local born' or 'Malayan born' and others is seen as early as the 1920s. 'There is discernible a growing tendency among the younger generation of Indians', wrote an observer in May 1925, 'to disclaim all connections with India and take pride in calling themselves "Straits Borns".'[82] A rapid move towards westernization appears to have taken place among these people, in order to divest themselves of their 'Indian-ness' and move away from being identified with labour. This process was helped by the nature of the educational system, since children of middle-class Indians went to schools which imparted education in the English medium from the primary stage. There were no bilingual schools as in India or Ceylon, and the vernacular schools were of very low standard. The older people viewed with alarm the growth of a generation which could not read or write its Indian vernacular, and had no knowledge of, nor interest in its Indian heritage. *The Indian's* editorial in November 1925 asked for the arrest of this process by the firm implanting of Indian institutions in the country, so that this increasingly

[81] Cited in Parmer, op. cit., p. 76.
[82] *The Indian* (Vol. I, no. 2, May 1925).

alienated generation could remain within the folds of the Indian community.[83] The granting of concessions to Indians such as representation on Councils, eligibility for employment in certain services, and facilities for higher education, further widened the distinction between those who were born and domiciled in this country and those who were not. There was now more talk of identification with the country of settlement in order to be eligible for the plums that were now available. The President of the C.I.A.M. gave expression to this feeling when he said in March 1938: 'There is absolutely nothing in common between the politics of India and the politics of Malaya and I am sure this association will never make the mistake of importing Indian politics into this country, as an act of such a nature will only injure us.'[84]

There was thus a readiness among Indians to orient themselves towards the country of adoption, but this stopped short of cultural integration. Culturally, the Indian leadership frowned at any tendency to alienate themselves among any section of the community. They wanted the Indian community to preserve its integrity. This was even encouraged by Government policy, as communalism lay at the very basis of public policy in Malaya. The Indian community was getting its share of recognition because it was a separate and identifiable community, and its continuing advancement lay in such identity. For this reason it had to organize itself communally. And in Malaya at that time all social activity was communally organized. Such communal separateness led to the preservation and strengthening of its Indian-ness and as long as this Indian-ness was preserved the connexions with India would be implicitly retained. In short, the aims of preserving the identity of the Indian community in Malaya and of cutting off all connexions with India were not compatible.

Thus it was that in spite of deliberate and conscious efforts to do so, the Indian middle class could not altogether cut itself off from India. The President of the C.I.A.M., in the very same speech cited above, referred approvingly to

[83] Ibid. (Vol. I, no. 8, November 1925).
[84] C.I.A.M., *Speech delivered by Dr. A. M. Soosay . . .*, op. cit., p. 5.

the fact that the Association was recognized in India as the spokesman of Malayan Indians and its activities reported frequently in the Indian press. The Indian Agent had actively assisted in the formation of the C.I.A.M. Its leaders went to India to participate in the annual sessions of the Indian National Congress. More important than all these, ideological factors tended to strengthen the ties with India. The radical nationalists among the Malayan Indian intelligentsia saw the struggle for upliftment of Indians in Malaya as a political struggle against British imperialism. Here the Malayan-based radical saw the Indian nationalist as a natural ally, sometimes even a foster parent. In spite of the pledge not to import Indian politics into Malaya, the years just preceding the Second World War saw the spread of Indian nationalist ideology among Indians of all classes. This really opens a new chapter in the political development of the Malayan Indians, signalled by the labour unrest of 1941 and leading to the traumatic events during the Japanese occupation. The C.I.A.M. played an active role in the Klang strikes of 1941 as much from political as industrial motives. A prominent member of the C.I.A.M. and leader of opinion among Malayan Indians wrote in 1938: 'Until the local Indians cease to be aliens and gain the status of the Malayans, it is the duty of Indian nationalism to see that the settlers here continue to be true Indians and to counteract any attempts which seek to divide one section of Indians from another.'[85] The rising tide of Indian nationalism swept before it any incipient Malayan orientation or de-Indianization.

Indians and the Japanese War, 1941–1945

Malaya and its inhabitants were deeply affected in various ways by the events of the Second World War. All communities suffered from the administrative chaos and economic dislocation caused by the British withdrawal. It is fair to say that Indians suffered most because of their inherent vulnerability. Many of them had no secure roots in the country and were precariously dependent upon a wage economy that could

[85] K. A. Neelakandha Aiyer, op. cit., p. 89.

not operate under Japanese military occupation. They were among the worst affected by the general scarcity of food and the breakdown of health and sanitation services in the country in general and in the plantations in particular, as well as the disappearance of a secure monthly income for their daily sustenance.

At the first signs of trouble there was quite a substantial repatriation among the professional and commercial classes. As the theatre of Japanese operations became closer there was a panic exodus to India. Those who could not go themselves sent their wives and children. Many Chettyar and other businessmen left, entrusting their establishments to agents and nominees. This panic-filled operation, together with a similar exodus at the end of the war, was an eye-opener to the Indian upper and middle classes. The extent to which they still sought security in their mother country was marked, as was also the flimsy nature of their roots in their country of adoption. This repatriation process, though it involved only a small fraction of the community, together with the events that took place in Malaya, served to strengthen the Indian orientation of the community, which the relative prosperity of the pre-war years had weakened. There was an equally strong reaction among Malay nationalists, who were confirmed in their worst suspicions that the immigrant communities would pack their bags at the slightest sign of trouble. They felt justified in refusing to accept these people as belonging to the country.

The bulk of the Indian community remained behind to face Japanese occupation and underwent unique experiences that had their origins in a movement which involved the whole Indian community of Malaya, the largest of such communities in Japan's military empire. The Japanese policy of pan-Asianism, behind which they cloaked their imperialist designs, captured some sections of the Indian nationalist movement which would utilize any weapon to get rid of British dominance. Such extremist elements had left India from time to time and sought refuge in various countries, hoping to attract foreign assistance in a war of liberation. The most famous of these defectors was Subash Chandra

Bose, the innovator of the idea that India could use the struggle between the Axis powers and the West to secure her freedom. He had broken with the Indian National Congress on this issue and fled to Berlin in 1941. As Japan advanced westwards, reducing the colonial territories of western powers to its hegemony, there appeared to be a convergence between Japanese aims and the desire of nationalist extremists to expel the British from India. These nationalists and the Japanese sought to use each other to achieve their own aims.

The Japanese set about organizing Indian leaders in the countries of South-east Asia that were now under their sway to channelize and make effective use of this movement. Conferences were held in Japan and in Bangkok, bringing leaders from all these countries together to co-ordinate action. Rash Behari Bose was chosen as the leader of this East Asian Indian nationalist group. He was an extremist Indian nationalist and fugitive from British justice, who had been settled in Japan for over thirty years. He had married a Japanese wife, could speak the Japanese language fluently, and was from the point of view of the Japanese an apt choice. Malayan Indian leaders were among those attending these conferences. One of the delegates was Mr. K. A. Nilakandha Aiyer, the Secretary of the C.I.A.M. and a prominent nationalist radical. He was unfortunately killed in a plane crash on the way to attend the Tokyo conference in August 1942. At these conferences, broad agreement was reached on marshalling support among Indian communities of South-east Asia for a united nationalist effort to liberate India with Japanese military assistance.

It was clear from the outset that Malaya would be the centre of the movement: it was geographically close to India; it had a large Indian population; its leaders entered the movement with enthusiasm from the outset; and most important of all, units of the British Indian Army stationed in Malaya had surrendered, and would form the nucleus of the Indian National Army that was to be formed. Rash Behari Bose was despatched to Singapore at the end of 1942 to go ahead with organizing the political and the military sections of the movement. The Indian Independence League

was the political arm of the movement, with Bose as its leader. On its executive committee of five was N. Raghavan, the President of the C.I.A.M. and a Malayan Indian nationalist. Colonel Mohan Singh, an officer of the Indian army, was chosen to head the Indian National Army. Indian prisoners of war were encouraged to volunteer. By the end of 1942, 16,000 had volunteered and Mohan Singh was made a major.

Indian leaders in Malaya were at first rather suspicious of Japanese intentions, and were very wary about collaborating with them. Rash Behari Bose's obviously pro-Japanese attitude did not help. They leaned more towards the nationalism of the Indian National Congress, and did not want to do anything that would disturb Congress strategy. There were tensions between the Japanese and the Independence League, and between the League and the Indian National Army. Because of these disputes no concrete progress was achieved. Malayan Indian leaders wished the movement to be a purely Indian movement with no interference from the Japanese, acting only to further the struggle being waged in India by the Congress, not as a rival nationalist movement.

The arrival of Subash Chandra Bose changed all this. He landed first at Tokyo in a Japanese submarine in June 1943, where he discussed policy and strategy with high Japanese officials. He arrived in Singapore in July and quickly took command of the situation. He was made president of the Independence League, and Commander-in-Chief of the I.N.A. A Provisional Government of Free India (Azad Hind) was declared in October 1943, with Bose as Prime Minister. A few Malayan Indian leaders were given offices in this Government. The Azad Hind Government declared war on Britain and America. It was recognized by Japan, Germany, and Italy, and six other countries. Now Bose set about mobilizing full financial and political support from the Indian community of Malaya and Burma. Financial support was important as he wanted to build up the I.N.A. into an effective military force that would not only free India but be the nucleus for the defence of her independence.

The initial impact of Bose's personality on the Indian

community of Malaya was terrific. He was undisputedly a born leader of men and a dynamic personality, possessed of a moving power of oratory. He toured the country making rousing speeches to groups of Indians. Malayan Indians, unused to such political oratory, were swept off their feet and responded warmly. Volunteers flocked to the movement. Branches of the League were established in every major town and even in the plantations. Recruitment to the I.N.A. picked up. Differences among officers and civilians were forgotten when they were confronted with Bose's supreme confidence. After his addresses to Indian prisoners of war, thousands enlisted. Discreditable methods were used to persuade enlistment. These were overlooked, and eyes were firmly set on the final objective. The slogan *Chalo Delhi* (Let us go to Delhi!) was on everybody's lips.

Bose desired to be independent of the Japanese as far as possible in the matter of funds for equipping his army. With this end he launched a campaign for the utmost possible financial contribution from the wealthy sections of Malayan Indians. With the initial enthusiasm, response was good. Well-to-do Indians of Singapore and the Peninsula donated cash, and ladies stripped themselves of their gold jewellery for the movement. But as expenses increased, Bose's demands grew, and Malayan Indians had to bear the brunt. The wealthy Indians felt harassed, and avoided payment by various means. Now the authoritarian streak in Bose's character came to the fore and he issued threats to these people. 'I stand here representing the Provisional Government of Azad Hind', he said, 'which has absolute rights over your lives and properties. . . . We have to carry out Total Mobilization voluntarily if possible, by compulsion if necessary.'[86] He now changed from voluntary contributions to a systematic levy on property. A Board of Management for Raising Funds was set up in 1944 to which Indians had to declare their assets. Levies up to 25 per cent were imposed and collected. Towards the end of 1944, with the war going badly for the Japanese, it was difficult to collect these levies. The I.N.A. had a monthly budget of around 5 million

[86] Cited in H. Toye, *The Springing Tiger* (London, 1959), p. 95.

dollars, a sum which largely came from the Indian community of South-east Asia.

Early in 1944, the I.N.A. went into action for the first time on the Burma front. In January, Subash Bose proceeded to Rangoon, where he set up the advance headquarters of the I.N.A. Together with the Japanese, the I.N.A. suffered a number of reverses. A good many deserted to the British. The bulk of the army surrendered in June. With the Japanese surrender in August 1945, the Provisional Government and the I.N.A. were dissolved.

Though in terms of what it set out to do the whole venture may be dismissed as a fiasco, its total impact on the Malayan Indian community has to be considered seriously. It gave a sense of mission and purpose to the Indians, an estimation in their own minds that they were making history on behalf of the people of the Indian sub-continent. This feeling of importance was good for their morale, enabling them to build up confidence in themselves. This was very necessary to dispel the sense of futility and aimlessness that had descended over the community in the pre-war years. Here was an opportunity to do something positive. It introduced a dynamism into their thinking and action. Though the immediate issue proved sterile, such involvements were bound to have long-term effects.

It had a profound effect on the educated class. It brought them out of their timidity and aversion to political activity. They were the spearhead of Malayan participation in the Independence League, and had opportunities for leadership. Large sections of this class had earlier been most reluctant to involve themselves in the struggles of Indian nationalism on the ground that this was a purely Indian affair and no concern of theirs. They now swung to the other extreme of full involvement in Indian nationalism. In the process they imbibed nationalistic ideas which they were to live with for many years. It brought about a readjustment in their attitude to the colonial power when its authority was re-established. The old subservience was gone. The Indian middle class of Malaya in the post-war era was anti-imperialist, and was prepared to support nationalist elements among other

communities and work with them for the eventual liberation of Malaya. A well-known Indian leader, reminiscing later on these events, said: 'When Netaji Subash Chandra Bose came, many Indians felt that not only would they fight for *swaraj* in India, but for *swaraj* of the people in Malaya . . . that they would be able to be rid of the people who stood upon them.'[87] This radical nationalism was also the starting point to branch off into socialist, trade unionist, and even communist activity, in which the Malayan Indian intelligentsia participated prominently in the post-war years.

The impact on Indian labour of the activities of the League and the events of the war was equally great. The Independence League took political activity into the plantations for the first time. Labourers volunteered for the Indian National Army and others formed local volunteer corps or *Thondar Padai* in the estates, devoted to nationalist activity. The spread of nationalist ideas in the estates had already begun just prior to the war. Nationalist pamphlets and broadsheets in Tamil conveying Congress propaganda had already found their way into the estates. The League served to intensify this trend and bring it into the open. Tamil school teachers, *kanganys*, and the more literate among young labourers were the leaders of this awakening. They participated fully in the League's activities. The anti-western character of nationalist propaganda was to affect the attitude of the labourer towards the European boss when he returned. He had previously stood in awe of him and dared not cross his path. His wrath against established authority had been vented on the lesser representatives of power such as *kanganys*, clerks, and conductors. Instances of his defiance of the European planter were extremely rare. All this changed with the regeneration of the labourer. The younger generation of labourers in particular now stood up to the manager. The old paternalistic control could no longer be exercised. This accounts for the transitional period of chaos and disorder on the plantations between the decline of the paternalism of the manager, and the rise of responsible leaders from among the labourers.

[87] Cited in Gamba, op. cit., p. 14.

The ideas of self-reliance and self-help engendered during the difficult years of Japanese occupation left a marked impact on the labourer's attitude. It was easy enough for political activity in the Independence League to be transformed into industrial activity and collective organization. The spread of trade unions and various forms of social reformist activities among Indian labourers after the war resulted from the potential released at that time. This led to the labourer breaking out of his communal shell, and created in him an awareness of the world outside the plantations and, more immediately, a disposition to work with other communities, such as the Chinese, in industrial activity. This is a marked feature of the immediate post-war years.

The events of this period also served to unite the Indian community in Malaya, an achievement which had previously eluded the various groups and persons working towards this end. Before the outbreak of the war, there was no nexus of unity, and no common body of experiences and attitudes to bring this about. Commercial and mercantile groups kept very much to themselves, minding their own business. The professional middle class was divided between radicals and conservatives, Indo-centricists and Malaya-centricists. A wide gulf separated labourers from the upper classes. A few pre-war attempts to bridge the gulf had not been conspicuously successful. Now the strong and overpowering nature of Indian nationalist ideology and the struggle to achieve its aims brought these disparate groups together. After the war, it was clearly observable that Indians of all classes and groups were emotionally drawn towards each other. Out of this growing pan-Indian identification it became possible to bring Indians effectively together in one all-embracing political organization.

In its elements, this new-found ideology and the political activity it engendered had little or no relevance to Malaya. In a sense it alienated Indians from their Malayan environment and put obstacles in the way of their successful integration. After the war, the struggle for India's freedom was carried on exclusively on the Indian sub-continent, and

was but remotely the concern of Indians settled in Malaya. Yet their Indian orientation was so strong that Malayan Indian eyes were glued to these events. After India's independence, her internal politics were closely followed and aroused deep interest. The charisma of Indian political leaders extended across the Bay of Bengal and evoked a warmer response than the local leaders of the community.

Apart from political and ideological factors and in terms of actual physical conditions, Indians as a community suffered deeply. In the discussion of the growth of the Indian population above, the effects of the war as a factor in its absolute decline in numbers have been already noted. When the British armed forces withdrew, all European personnel in Government service and in the private sector were evacuated. This left the plantations without management and dislocated their entire operation. The Japanese attempted to restart operations, but only in some estates, which ran at a fraction of their full capacity. With the western market denied her, Malayan rubber declined in output and efficiency. The labourers, deprived of an assured wage packet at the end of the month, were left to fend for themselves. The many amenities provided for them in the estates declined and were allowed to lapse. Estate hospitals and sanitary and drainage facilities deteriorated. There was acute shortage of essential foodstuffs. Malaya's traditional sources of supply were interrupted. Rice, the staple Indian diet, was almost impossible to come by. Estate shops which had provided rice and other essential commodities of the labourer at reasonable rates were closed down. The food shortage affected all classes of the population. Those in towns were the hardest hit. Estate labourers attempted to live on diverse substitutes such as tapioca and millet. Those who bred cattle were fortunate in having milk products as the only part of their diet with nutritive value. Many Indians in contemporary Malaya reminisce on the hardships they suffered in these years. The struggle to secure food occupied most of their time. People sold their gold jewellery to purchase food. Malnutrition and undernourishment took a heavy toll. The special conscription of labourers to work in

heavy, distant projects, such as the Siam Railway, compounded their difficulties. Here labourers lived and worked in the most inhuman and unhealthy conditions. Of the many who were thus taken away, few returned. The Indians were about 14 per cent of the Malayan population in 1940; this proportion had dropped to 10 per cent by 1947.

IV | Political Developments after 1945

With the return of British military and political control over Malaya in 1945, Malayan Indian politics entered a new phase. The British military administration was hostile to the Indian nationalist movement which had functioned from Malaya under the Japanese. Officers of the Indian National Army were despatched to India for investigation and trial for treasonable activities. Local recruits to the movement disbanded before the arrival of the British. Indian leaders who had played a prominent part in the League thought it prudent to lie low for some time, lest they incur the hostility of the authorities and invite legal action for their activities. A few of them had left for India, deciding to settle there for good. Court martial proceedings were instituted against some I.N.A. officers. Some civilians, suspected of treasonable acts, were interned both in Malaya and Burma. The Indian National Congress, which was organizing the legal defence of all I.N.A. officers accused in India, moved a resolution protesting against these arrests, and nominated Pandit Nehru to proceed to Burma and Malaya to organize defence and relief committees locally.[1] In May 1946 a top-level decision was taken in Delhi not to proceed with I.N.A. prosecutions. This wise decision made the many civilian ex-members of the I.N.A. and the Independence League feel more secure. Yet the events of 1942–5 and their present outcome had scared the leadership into caution. The old C.I.A.M. leadership had dispersed; some were dead, some had returned to India, and others were tainted with active participation in the activities of the Independence League.

[1] Resolution of A.I.N.C., Calcutta, 1945, quoted in N. V. Rajkumar, *Indians outside India* (New Delhi, 1951).

A section of the Indian political leadership continued along the path of nationalist radicalism and drifted naturally towards left-wing political ideologies. The Malayan Communist Party was now claiming to continue the struggle against British colonialism in other ways. These left-wing Indian nationalists moved closer to the M.C.P. because of an identity in goals: the overthrow of British imperial power. In October 1945 an Indian Democratic League was formed in Singapore by these elements, and soon became one of the many communist-penetrated bodies in the country. At the same time, left-wing newspapers and journals appeared in English and in Tamil, owned and edited by Indians and spreading anti-colonialist propaganda of an extreme kind.[2]

Almost all such expressions of Indian radical organizational and journalistic activity were to be found in Singapore. In the Peninsula, Indian leadership, such as it was, was cautious and reluctant to push itself forward. It had no sympathy with the left wing ideologies which were now increasingly appealing to a section of the Indian middle class and, indeed, of the working class. But it had as yet no platform or organization to arrest this trend. When Nehru visited the country in March 1946, he may be assumed to have given the leaders some salutary advice on the need for a broad-based organization. Furthermore, in the Federated States, constitutional problems were becoming the subject of political controversy. The Malayan Union was attacked by the Malays from the moment it was announced in October 1945. The British Government had agreed to revise its proposals, and active consultations were going on with the Malay Sultans and the Malay nationalist leaders on a future constitution. Apart from the general interest which Indians had in these discussions affecting the future development of the country, there were some specific issues of immediate relevance to Indians such as citizenship and representation. It was necessary to form Indian opinion on these questions, and present such opinion to the Government in an effective way.

[2] Typical examples of such papers are *Indian Daily Mail* (English) and *Nava Yugam* (Tamil).

All these factors led to the formation of the Malayan Indian Congress in August 1946; the name was an obvious reminder of the Indian National Congress. Indian leaders were not at all ashamed of the Indian connexion. The activities of the Indian Independence League in Malaya had drawn them into the vortex of Indian nationalism. Seven Malayan Indian delegates went to attend the Meerut sessions of the Indian National Congress in August 1946. Such attendance was repeated at annual sessions for some time. The first president of the M.I.C. was Mr. John Thivy, the son of Mr. Louis Thivy, who had been prominent in the C.I.A.M. and in pre-war Indian politics. John Thivy was a nationalist radical, who had been active in the Independence League under Japanese occupation, and held office in the Provisional Government of Azad Hind.

If it was the ambition of the M.I.C., in the early years of its formation, to occupy in Malayan Indian politics a role comparable to the Indian National Congress, this was far from realization. The M.I.C. was not the only body that claimed the loyalty of the Indians. There were at least two others, the Malayan Indian Association and the Federation of Indian Organizations. Some prominent Indians kept out of the M.I.C., and it had no following among Indian labourers. In fact, none of the Indian political associations of this time had any impact on plantation or urban labour. They did not concern themselves with labour questions even to the limited extent that the C.I.A.M. had. The M.I.C. did not have effective branch organizations in different parts of the country, and it was quite weak in Singapore. It was therefore not surprising that neither the British Government nor the other political parties took the M.I.C. seriously in its first years.

The most important question affecting Indians at this time was citizenship. When the Malayan Union proposals were announced, they included provisions for a common Malayan citizenship. It embraced all Malays, Chinese, Indians, and others who had been born in the country before the date when the order came into force, as well as those who had been resident there for ten out of the fifteen years preceding

15 February 1942. These were to be citizens by the operation of the law. In addition, citizenship was to be given, on application, to those who had resided in these territories for five out of eight years preceding the application. These were very liberal provisions and would have granted citizenship to a vast majority of Indians in the country, without imposing on them the difficulty of making a definite decision to break with their status in their country of origin. Malay political opinion immediately came out in force against these provisions, and the citizenship question became a heated political issue stirring up communal passions. The main participants in this controversy were the Malays and the principal minority community, the Chinese, but Indians entered the debate with whatever strength they could muster.

In response to Malay opinion, the Government dropped the Malayan Union proposals, and entered into consultations with the Sultans and national organizations. The result was the compromise agreement of the Federation of Malaya constitution. This proposed constitution made provision for an enlarged Federal Executive Council, and a Legislative Council, with a system of functional representation of communities, economic interests, and territorial units. The Executive Council could appoint from five to seven unofficial members. The unofficial membership of the Legislative Council was to be increased to fifty, consisting of persons nominated for labour, planting, mining, and commerce, educational and cultural interests, and individual communities. Citizenship by law was to be given to those born in the territories of the Federation, and to those whose fathers were Federal citizens. Citizenship by application would be given to those with fifteen years residence out of twenty years preceding the application if they possessed a knowledge of English or Malay, and made a declaration of intention of permanent settlement in the country.

These proposals, agreed to by Malay representatives and the Government, were now put before a Consultative Committee consisting of non-Malay representative leaders. This Committee of nine had two Indians and two Chinese among its members. It heard representations from many

non-Malay parties and leaders in many parts of the country. The M.I.C., in alliance with some other nationalist parties, was boycotting the inquiry, but several prominent Indian leaders and Indian organizations submitted memoranda. The main thesis of their submissions was that the citizenship rules should be relaxed. Their point of view was best expressed by Mr. R. Ramani, a prominent Indian lawyer and leader of opinion, who felt that the residential qualification of fifteen years was too long, and wanted it reduced to five. He also came out strongly against the proposed declaration of permanent settlement in Malaya as a condition for citizenship. He made a distinction between people *regarding* Malaya as their home and *making* it their home.[3] The Indian point of view during these years was that it should be possible for a person who has lived and served many years in Malaya to go back to his retirement in India if he chose to. This should not affect his enjoyment of political and other rights in Malaya as long as he lived there. This was precisely what the Malays would not concede. They argued that a man who has not made up his mind about the country he wished to settle in would have a dual loyalty, and should not be permitted to enjoy political rights or share in political power. This was one of their chief objections to the Union proposals. They required a formal declaration of intention, and a visible severing of connexions, once and for all, with the country of origin.

Another topic of general comment in the Indian memoranda to the Consultative Committee was what they felt to be the inadequate representation of the Indian community on the Legislative Council. The proposed scheme gave Indians two members selected communally. The Indians wanted many more, some suggested six, at least half as many as the Chinese. Submissions from Indian minority sub-groups, such as Indian Muslims and Sikhs, asked for separate representation on the Council. A new factor entering Malayan Indian politics was the separatism of Indian Muslims after the war, and the formation of an Indian Muslim League to represent

[3] Malayan Union, *Memorandum of R. Ramani, 8 January 1947, Report of the Consultative Committee on the Constitutional Proposals, 21 March 1947*, pp. 20–4.

their interests. Echoing the sentiments of the Muslim League of India, their leaders told the Committee: 'Indians and Muslims belong to two different nations; . . . indeed, they belong to two different civilizations based on conflicting ideas and conceptions.' They could not therefore be yoked together under a single representation.[4] The Sikhs and the Ceylonese also asked for special representation.

The Consultative Committee considered these memoranda, interviewed individuals, and made recommendations substantially accepting the proposed constitution. A few minor changes were made in the unofficial functional representation to the legislature, and on qualifications for citizenship. The residential qualification for citizenship by application was to be reduced to eight years of residence out of the previous fifteen years, instead of ten years out of twenty. They added a further provision enabling anyone over 45 years of age who had been resident in the Straits Settlements or the Malayan States for over twenty years, to qualify for citizenship. Finally, they recommended that for two years after the commencement of the Constitution the language qualification for citizenship should be waived. They felt that the sudden imposition of a language qualification would be unfair to older residents, though the Committee did recognize the need for a common medium of communication if a common citizenship was to be effective. The two Chinese members of the Committee make some minority recommendations which would have increased the proportion of non-Malays in the legislature and further liberalized the citizenship laws. The two Indian members did not support them, and signed the majority report. This, however, does not mean that they were representing the views of the Indian community. They were both nominated by Government, and were not representative of any popular-based association of Indians.

The final scheme accepted by the Government and enacted as the Federation of Malaya Agreement brought into force in 1948, incorporated many of the suggestions of the Committee. The fifty unofficial seats were allocated so as to give Malays twenty-two seats, Chinese fourteen, Europeans seven,

[4] *Memorandum from Indian Muslim League, 11 February 1947*, ibid., p. 28.

Indians five, Ceylonese one, and Eurasians one. To qualify for citizenship by operation of the law, the basic requirement of fifteen years residence was maintained. For citizenship by application, the residence qualification was eight years out of the previous twelve, or fifteen years out of the last twenty. The language requirements and the declaration of permanent settlement were retained. By administrative action, the Government promised a lenient interpretation of the language requirement for one year. Applicants who had lived in the territories of the Federation for at least twenty years were exempt from the language qualification until February 1951. These rules still kept many Indians out of citizenship, and Indian opinion was not satisfied either with the degree of representation in the legislature, or with the provisions of the citizenship law. The Government's repudiation of the claims for separate representation of Indian sub-groups curbed separatist tendencies. Such voices were in fact not to be heard henceforth. It was realized that if anything was to be gained, it would be for the Indians as a whole rather than any segment of them.

Nationalist and leftist elements opposed to the re-establishment of British authority and wanting a speedy progress towards self-government, refused to accept the limited constitutional progress offered by the British. They came together in the All-Malaya Council of Joint Action. Some Malay nationalist parties, Chinese groups, and the M.I.C. participated in this united front. Malay leaders soon broke away from it when on citizenship and representation differences between them and other communities widened. The Council thus became a predominantly Chinese and Indian affair, and lost its effectiveness. It opposed the 1947 Constitution and did not participate in the consultations. Indian opinion was not firmly behind the M.I.C. in its support of the Council for Joint Action. Some of the constituent units in this front were known to be pro-communist, and alliance with such forces did not please the conservatives in the Indian leadership. Indian labour organized in trade unions that were now under a radical and left-wing leadership gave support to the front.

The outbreak of communist guerilla activity and the declaration of emergency in June 1948 put an end to the united front. Constituent bodies of the All-Malaya Council of Joint Action either went underground or dissolved themselves. The M.I.C., in confusion, announced a voluntary suspension of all political activity until the end of the emergency. The Indian community had reached the nadir of its political influence. The Government had no confidence in its leadership, and its various organizations had no means of making themselves heard by the Government. When a Communities Liaison Committee was formed in 1945 consisting of leaders of various communities, a Ceylonese was appointed to it but not an Indian. In 1951 the 'member system' was introduced into the Federal Government. Unofficial members were appointed by the Government as political heads, and spokesmen in the legislature for certain departments. Among those appointed were three Malays, one Chinese, one European, and one Ceylonese. Again Indians were excluded from a share of political power.

In 1951 a major realignment of forces took place in the Malayan political scene. Dato Onn bin Jaafar, a prestigious Malay political leader, resigned as head of the United Malay National Organization and formed a new party, the Independence of Malaya Party, in the conviction that Malays should take the lead in creating and developing inter-communal political opinion if independence was to be achieved soon. The M.I.C., in its search for inter-communal contacts, came out firmly behind the new party, as did the Indian president of the Trade Union Council. As was probably to be expected, influential Malay forces repudiated this bold and radical move on the part of their erstwhile leader. Seeing the lack of a Malay base for the new party, the Chinese, under the newly-formed Malayan Chinese Association, also withdrew their support. The I.M.P. was thus left to rely on whatever influence its leader could muster among the Malays, together with the support of the M.I.C. and trade union interests. Malayan politics were now a struggle between the U.M.N.O. and the M.C.A. in alliance, both with a mainly conservative leadership, and the I.M.P.

leading radical and non-communal forces with strong Indian backing. A trial of strength between the two forces came about in the municipal elections in Kuala Lumpur in February 1952. Out of twelve seats, the U.M.N.O.–M.C.A. alliance won nine, the I.M.P. won two, and one went to an independent candidate. Other local election results confirmed the victory of the alliance parties, and the I.M.P. policies appear to have been decisively rejected by the Malays, who formed the bulk of the voters. With a view to reviving the flagging enthusiasm for his independence movement and embracing all communities, Dato Onn called a Malaya National Conference to which all political parties were invited. The U.M.N.O. and the M.C.A. declined to attend and deprived it of any effect. Representatives of Indian and Ceylonese organizations attended the Conference.

The M.I.C. leadership now came to realize that it had continuously been backing the wrong horse in Malayan politics. This had resulted in a denial of its share of political power, which was gradually being handed over to other communities. It must be said in fairness to the leaders that they were pursuing the ideal of non-communal politics in a situation where communalism was becoming entrenched as the very basis of political organization. This becomes clear if one looks closely at the background of these leaders. The first president of the M.I.C. was an Indian Christian, the second a Sikh, and the third a Punjabi Hindu. They all belonged to minority groups within the Indian community, where Tamil Hindus formed the overwhelming majority. Their position within the community was based on a common inter-group concensus irrespective of particularist identifications, and it was a logical step from this to an inter-communal concensus in Malayan politics. They were prepared to submerge Indian communalism and work with other communities. Their concept of nationalist politics was very much influenced by the experience and example of the Indian sub-continent. They conceived of a movement for Malaya like the Indian National Congress, consisting of a liberal nationalist leadership drawn from all communities. This was why they were attracted by the efforts of Dato Onn,

and were prepared to lend him their support even when his task appeared hopeless.

Towards the end of 1953, the M.I.C. took an important decision, representing a *volte face* in its policies and alliances. The U.M.N.O.–M.C.A. Alliance appeared to have caught on, and people were responding to it as a genuine attempt at working together by two communally-organized parties. The Alliance called a conference to rival the National Conference of Dato Onn, where it adopted a platform of inter-communal unity and independence within the British Commonwealth. The decision of the M.I.C. was made easier because Dato Onn now shifted to a more extremist Malay position. Early in 1954 he formed the Party Negara, and sought to recapture popularity by championing Malay extremism. Already towards the end of 1953, the M.I.C. had moved closer to the Alliance. Now it became a full member of the Alliance, its third constituent party, and the representative of the Indian community in the country. It was promised proportional representation in future elections. Joining what was in effect a coalition of communal parties, it abandoned its policy of helping to forge a national political force. But immediate rewards from its new policy were soon forthcoming. In the Federal elections of 1955, the Alliance nominated two Indians among its candidates. Both were returned, though Indians did not constitute anything near a majority in any of the constituencies. They were only 4·6 per cent of the electorate, and were widely distributed. The election of the two M.I.C. members was only made possible by the support of their Alliance partners. In the Federal Cabinet formed by Tunku Abdul Rahman after the elections, the leader of the M.I.C., Mr. V. T. Sambanthan, was appointed a minister. The faith of the M.I.C. in the Alliance was thereafter never to be shaken.

The increasing political influence of the Indian community went hand in hand with increasing membership of the political community of Malaya. By the 1948 citizenship laws, only a small population of Indians qualified for citizenship. Of those who were eligible to apply, very few bothered to do so. In 1952 the laws were revised and made

more liberal. Those born in Penang or Malacca now acquired citizenship automatically. Those born in the Federation also became citizens if one parent had also been born there. By these laws over 222,000 Indians could secure citizenship automatically. Another 186,000 had the birth qualifications for citizenship.[5] Thus over 60 per cent of Indians could now enter the political community and exercise political rights. But for a long time Indians in the Federation, unlike those in Singapore, were apathetic in the exercise of these rights. In the elections of 1955 only 49,000 took the trouble to register as voters out of about 222,000 federal citizens, and they made up only 4·6 per cent of the electorate. Citizenship laws were further relaxed in 1957 after independence. The laws, as enacted in the constitution of independent Malaya, conceded the principle of *jus soli* which Chinese and Indian leaders had been pressing for all along. Any person born in the Federation on or after the date of independence became a Federal citizen. For citizenship by application, the residence qualification was reduced to five years out of the preceding seven. Any person resident in the Federation for eight out of the preceding twelve years could apply for citizenship. These laws solved the problem of citizenship for Indians. By 1959, the Indian proportion of the electorate was 7·4 per cent, still measurably below the population ratio.

In Singapore, politics after 1948 took a different turn from the Federation, and so did the nature of Indian participation in political activity. Even before the war, various segments of the Indian community in the colony showed more sophistication in political thinking and organization than those on the mainland. Indian labourers integrated with the Chinese in industrial activity and associations. Reformist ideas and movements originated here, and then spread to the Federation. Radical and left-wing leadership sprang from the island colony. The Singapore Regional Indian Congress appeared to have as little influence as the M.I.C., though it too claimed to speak on behalf of the Indians. In 1946 the first election to the Legislative Council was held. The franchise, restricted to British subjects, was favourable to Indians, and

[5] Federation of Malaya, *Annual Report*, 1953, pp. 16–19.

in both the 1946 and the 1948 elections Indians were successful. In 1948, out of six elected Councillors, there were three Indians. The S.R.I.C., adopting the non-co-operation policy of the M.I.C., boycotted the elections. Indians contested as members of non-communal parties called 'Progressives' and 'Independents'. In the 1951 elections, three Indians were elected for a total of nine contested seats, also from non-communal parties—'Progressives' and 'Labour'. An additional Indian was nominated to the legislature through the Indian Chamber of Commerce. Indian domination of the Legislative Council was caused by the unrepresentative character of the electorate, with less than 2 per cent of the population participating in elections. In 1953 the Rendel Commission proposed a new constitution, extending the franchise and granting partial responsible government. In the elections of 1955, when twenty-five seats were contested, the Chinese as the majority of the island's population gained the ascendancy. Indian membership in the Council was reduced to two.

One effect of these developments was the total eclipse of the S.R.I.C. It had always been dominated by North Indian businessmen and could never establish support with the Tamil and Malayalee workers. The growth of the party system and the early founding of representative institutions diminished the appeal of communalism in Singapore. Indians divided themselves ideologically in supporting conservative, liberal, and socialist parties. When left-wing parties such as the People's Action Party (in 1954) and later the Barisan Socialis were formed, Indian radicals helped considerably in their organization. Indian trade unionists provided a militant leadership in left-wing parties. A number of Indian leaders have been interned at various times for suspected communist activity. The political influence which Indian leaders came to enjoy was because of their ideological position and not because of their communal identification. Herein lay a difference from the political influence of Indian leaders in the Federation, which springs from their conscious identification as members of the Indian community.

Both in the Federation and in Singapore, inter-group tensions within the Indian community must be taken into account in understanding political developments. Both the M.I.C. and the S.R.I.C. were in these years middle- and upper-class bodies, with little or no mass backing. Their leadership reflected the heterogeneity of the professional and commercial groups who were their chief supporters. These groups, as we have already seen, were drawn from all parts of India. In an effort to hold these groups together in one body, sentiments of pan-Indian unity were emphasized and regional differences were played down. Both the Malayan and the Singapore Congress would hold their meetings and issue most of their publications in English, the only common language between these groups. This naturally tended to leave out the majority of Indians who did not know English, and were solely Tamil-speakers. When these leaders did think of an Indian language, they decided in favour of Hindi, which had been chosen as the national language of India after independence. The M.I.C. resolved in June 1947 to teach Hindi to Indians in Malaya as the language of unity of that community. Both in the Federation and in Singapore Hindi classes were run by the Congress. This is an index of the Indian orientation of these leaders, and their lack of understanding of the realities of the Indian society of Malaya. To this was added the fact that many of them were of North Indian origin. The leaders of the Indians and the people whom they were claiming to lead appeared to be living in two different worlds.

It must be said, however, that in the Federation the M.I.C. did make some sporadic efforts to get across to Indian labouring groups when Thivy was president of the party in 1946–7. The M.I.C. leadership was generally more progressive than that of the Singapore Congress. The most notable of their activities was the prohibition movement. Prohibition has always been a cause close to the urban Indian middle class. Within a few months of its foundation, in October 1946, the M.I.C. inaugurated its anti-toddy campaign. At the grass-roots level, however, the campaign

was organized by young labour leaders in the plantations, men who had been politically activated by the Indian Independence League and were now promoting various reforms in estate society. The M.I.C. provided this movement with some national recognition, and sent some of its volunteers to the areas to help in organizing. The purpose of the campaign was to make Government pass legislation against toddy shops in estates by taking direct action. Volunteers picketed these shops and dissuaded clients from patronizing them. In some places the agitation led to ugly incidents and strong action by the police. In response to the agitation, the Government appointed an Estates Toddy Shops Committee to go into the question. As a result of the Committee's report it was decided not to open any new toddy shops on estates.[6] By a system of local option polls it was made possible to close down any existing shops. A move for total prohibition was defeated in the Legislative Council.

But such activity was exceptional, and in any case, the M.I.C. only capitalized on a movement that had its roots in the estates. It was recognized that if the M.I.C. was to be true to its name, it had to attract the mass of Indians in the country, who were Tamil labourers. But the leadership had neither the organization nor the ability to cross the gulf that divided them. They tried to get over the enormity of the problem by driving a wedge between those Indians supposedly loyal to Malaya and those who continued to look upon India as their home. Some members of the M.I.C. maintained that the community was divided into those who had decided to settle permanently in this country and therefore had a stake in its future, and those who were here only for their working lives and would finally retire to India, It was impossible for one party to cater for the interests of both these groups of people; the M.I.C. could only represent 'loyal' Indians, and should accordingly change its name and constitution. A new name, Malayan National Indian Congress, was proposed. The new draft constitution would limit membership to those with citizenship qualifications.

[6] Malayan Union, *Report of Toddy Shops Committee 13 March 1947, Proceedings of the Advisory Council*, 1947.

The constitution was discussed at the annual sessions of the M.I.C. in July 1949, but was voted down.[7] It was considered a move by an unpopular executive to retain leadership of the Congress.

Opposition to the M.I.C. leadership was building up both from within its ranks and from the community at large. Indian organs of opinion, both in English and Tamil, were giving expression to this opposition. The growth of this opposition corresponds with the growth of a secondary layer of leadership in the community, at first at regional level in estate labour society and in urban cultural associations. The opposition built up on two fronts. On the economic front, there was the grievance that the M.I.C. was not sufficiently concerning itself with the labourer. A number of questions relating to labour welfare had arisen during this period, and decisions had been taken on them by Government without the M.I.C. or any other Indian leaders sufficiently pressing the case of the labourer. It was the weight of numbers contributed by labourers that enabled the Indians to be recognized as one of the three major communities of Malaya. Out of this recognition issued a number of political concessions granted by Government which the middle class had, in the main, arrogated to themselves. It was only fair that they in turn should keep the interests of the labourers at the heart of their activities. This was not being done. Then there were the cultural and ethnic factors. It was felt that in a community which was predominantly Tamil, insufficient weight had been given to the Tamils in the leadership or in social and cultural activities.

This growing disillusion with the M.I.C. and dissatisfaction with its leadership and direction must be seen in conjunction with an important movement of Tamil cultural revivalism with distinct political implications. It had its origins in South India a decade or so earlier, but was gathering momentum in the immediate post-war years. In India it became an important movement, described by the term Dravidianism, emphasizing and upholding the Dravidian element in Indian culture. It was a broad-based movement

[7] *Indian Daily Mail*, 29 June 1949 and 11 July 1949.

with an impact on many fronts. In the socio-religious sphere it aimed at cleansing society of superstition, and at eradicating customs and beliefs not in keeping with the spirit of the modern age. It stood for anti-Brahmanism, and against excessive Sanskritization of religion and society. This meant an emphasis on the classical aspects of Tamil culture and an attempt to preserve the language and its literature in their pristine forms unaffected by the Sanskritic influences that came in later. On the political front, it meant an effort by non-Brahmin castes to band together to counter the power and prestige of Brahmins in the State, and a protracted struggle against Hindi as the national language and generally against 'northern domination'.

Even before the war, some of these ideas trickled into Malaya, and associations were formed here and there which took up social reform causes. Yet in the absence of Tamil leadership, the identity and interests of Tamils had not been vigorously promoted. In 1929, E. V. Ramasamy Naicker, leader of the Dravidian movement in Madras, had visited Malaya with a view to spreading his ideas in this country. The visit had temporarily caused interest in Tamil movements, and an All-Malaya Tamil Convention met annually for some time. It had also led to the formation of the Tamil Reform Association, and some attempts at social reform. With the growth of pan-Indian nationalist ideologies in Malaya and the activities of the Indian Independence League, these separatist and sub-group identifications were toned down. Adherence to a united Indian nationalism was popular not only among the middle class, but even among the working classes. National symbols like the Congress flag, and nationalist leaders such as Gandhi and Nehru were held in reverence. After 1946, however, with the growth of separatist linguistic nationalism in Madras, these ideas began to seep into Malaya more intensively. The Dravidian movement of Madras was closely followed and widely reported in the Malayan Tamil vernacular press. Developments in the Tamil literary world, *Thirukkural* movements, Poets and Writers Conventions, the Madurai Thamil Sangam and its activities: all these were

followed with interest. The anti-Hindi agitation in Madras state in 1949 drew considerable attention here, even to the extent of some young men leaving for Madras expressly to participate in the movement.

Cultural revivalism and the growing support by the middle class for the revivalist movement also had the effect of emphasizing the particularist traditions within Indian culture. Revival of Indian culture in Malaya took the form of greater interest in Tamil Literature, Tamil classical music of the Carnatic school, and the *Barathanatyam* dance form preserved only in the south. From 1948 there have been a crop of associations devoted towards promoting aspects of Tamil Culture. Works of the poets of the Tamil renaissance such as Subramanya Bharathi and Bharathidasan became popular. Even the Hindu religious revival was carried out as a part of the Tamil revival. All these activities brought together Tamils of all economic classes, and divided them from other Indian groups, resulting in the growth of Tamil linguistic nationalism. Propagandists sought to encourage the growth of such sentiments on the ground that the unity of the Tamils was an essential prerequisite to the unity of the Malayan Indian community. The editor of an influential national Tamil daily said that the policy of his paper was to secure the unity of the Tamils on the basis of language and culture as the only means for the unity of the Indian community.[8] As politics in the Federation developed in the 1950s along communal lines, such unity was thought axiomatic.

This Tamil nationalism brought into existence a number of organizations designed to promote specifically Tamil causes. There was the Tamil Reform Association, which continued to spearhead the new movement. The Malayan Tamil Pannai, formed in Kuala Lumpur soon after the war, was an active literary and cultural body. A Tamil Education Society was formed in Singapore in 1948 to centralize the management of Tamil schools and promote Tamil education. Years later such a society was formed in the Federation. In 1951, a Tamil Representative Council was formed in

[8] *Thamil Nesan*, 16 December 1954.

Singapore, bringing together all existing bodies furthering Tamil interests. This body decided to organize an annual festival of the Tamils of Malaya and Singapore as a symbolic occasion when they would give expression to their common cultural ties. The day of *Thai Ponggal* or a day close to it was selected to celebrate this Tamil festival. It was to be a secular festival of arts to symbolize the unity of Tamil-speaking people of all religions, castes, and classes. The first festival was held in the north Malayan state of Perlis in January 1951, and the second in Singapore. The idea spread throughout the Federation and today Tamil festivals are held every year in January in all parts of Malaya where Tamils are to be found in any number.

More specifically, we see manifestations of Dravidianism and attempts to found a Dravidian movement in Malaya. Malayan sympathizers of the Dravida Kalagam of Madras wrote to its leader, Ramasamy Naicker, soon after the war, seeking his advice on how they could popularize the movement in Malaya. He advised them to form Dravida Kalagams in all parts of the country, and maintain a close liaison with the parent body in Madras. This led to the formation of such Kalagams first in Singapore and Ipoh in 1946, and later in many other cities and towns. In 1947 these were brought together under the All Malaya Central Dravida Kalagam, which had an active existence for the next seven or eight years. The movement ran a weekly journal in Tamil called *Ina Mani* from December 1947, published by the Malayan central body, and a monthly called *Dravida Murasu* from January 1948, published by the Singapore Dravida Kalagam. These two journals had much impact on the Tamil reading public of the lower middle-class and working-class groups. Their contributors were drawn largely from Tamil teachers, trade union leaders, journalists, and other incipient leaders of local communities. The propaganda of these journals, together with the other public activities of the movement, contributed to changing the orientation of the Tamils of Malaya from a commitment to pan-Indian nationalism to a consciousness of Tamil separatism. The eyes of the people were turned from Gandhi

and Nehru to Ramasamy Naicker and C. N. Annathurai, from Tagore to Bharathidasan, from Delhi to Madras.

The total impact of these developments on the course of Indian politics in Malaya was very marked. Opinion began to be formed challenging the right of people of non-Tamil origin to lead and represent Malayan Indians. When representative government was introduced, the power of numbers began to tell. These propagandists never tired of reminding Indians that about 80 per cent among them were Tamils, so Tamil interests and Tamil leadership should predominate and the Tamil language should become a recognized language in the country like other minority languages. A leadership should emerge that understood and represented the aspirations of the Tamil masses. If the M.I.C. was to be a body that acted as the spokesman of Indians and was to be recognized as such, these new feelings had to be taken into account in its constitution. This happened after 1954, when the M.I.C. leadership was Tamilized. Tamils now occupied dominant positions in the organization. The party became responsive to Tamil opinion. Branches were formed in many parts of the country, in the main estate towns. The party's business and propaganda was now conducted mainly in the Tamil language. Regional leaders, and leaders from various segments of Tamil society, were given prominent positions. It is not without significance that the first M.I.C. member of the Federal Cabinet was given the portfolio of Labour.

After independence, when the M.I.C. had been firmly established as a partner in the ruling Alliance party, it was essential for it to have a mass base. It was possible to get such a base largely on account of the Tamil communalist identity. The rise of socialist parties to compete with the M.I.C. for the working-class Indian vote made things difficult for the M.I.C. In some areas, politically-conscious workers voted along ideological rather than communal lines, like the Indian workers in Singapore. But by and large, because of the persistence and prevalence of the communal appeal, the M.I.C. has kept control of the Indian vote. As there is no constituency where Indians are in a majority, there

is no chance to test the popularity of the party among its own people. In all the elections in the Federation, M.I.C. candidates have been returned to Parliament primarily on Alliance support. So in a sense the leaders of the M.I.C. are those chosen not only by the Indian people working through the party's organization, but also by the Malay leadership which dominates the Alliance. This tends to make these leaders somewhat ineffective as spokesmen for Indian interests on important questions. They lack an independence of action that they may have had if they depended solely on Indian support for their positions of leadership.

As a result of this situation, Indian leaders and the Indian community generally have a minimal influence in Malaysian politics. Their leaders prefer to seek and secure concessions on matters affecting the community behind closed doors, rather than to make political issues out of them. It must be admitted that something has been gained by such self-abnegation and political modesty. It has made the Malay leaders of the Alliance have full confidence in the M.I.C. leadership. The Prime Minister has frequently declared that he has had no trouble whatsoever from the M.I.C. Their leaders have never spoken out on the touchy problems of minority rights. There has been some doubt, however, whether this has been the most effective way of securing Indian interests. Sometimes, parties in opposition vocally champion some aspect of Indian rights, partly to embarrass the M.I.C. and upset the communal balance of the Alliance. Indians not sympathetic to the M.I.C. and its support of the governing party criticize it for being too passive in defence of the community's interests. It is difficult to see, however, given the small number of the Indian population (11 per cent), that the community could have afforded to pursue a vigorous policy in winning privileges for itself. Such a course might, as it did up to 1953, have antagonized Malay leaders and got the Indians nowhere. The only alternative seems to be completely non-communal politics, where Indians would play their part and be recognized on their intrinsic merits. At present, Indians are condemned to be the political under-dog, and being in such

a position they appear to have done well with their present policy of subordinate co-operation with the two other communities.

The political position of the M.I.C., and through it of the Indian community in the Malaysian polity, has become established with its admission into the Alliance party, which has dominated politics for the past fifteen years. In the elections of 1955, the first to be held in the country, the M.I.C. participated as one of the constituents of the Alliance. Two M.I.C. members, including its leader, were nominated as Alliance candidates. Both were elected with large majorities. In none of the constituencies did Indians come anywhere near a measurable proportion of the vote, let alone securing a majority over other racial groups. M.I.C. members were elected primarily on Malay votes provided for them by the U.M.N.O. section of the Alliance. A few other Indians contested as members of other parties, such as the Labour Party and the Perak Progressive Party, which later became the People's Progressive Party. Some of them were elected to Parliament, again predominantly on non-Indian votes. Two Indians were nominated to the upper house, the Senate, to represent labour, commercial, and political interests. The M.I.C. leader was appointed to the Cabinet with the portfolio of Labour.

In the next general elections, which took place after independence in 1959, the place of the M.I.C. as the third partner in the Alliance was reconfirmed. This time the Alliance nominated four M.I.C. members, including its leader and deputy leader, among its candidates. Three of them were returned, again with heavy Malay support provided by the U.M.N.O. party organization. The proportion of Indians in the electorate still remained at 8 per cent. A number of Indians were active in the leadership of other parties in opposition to the Alliance. The Socialist Front, a coalition of left-wing and radical parties, had a substantial vocal Indian leadership. Seven Indians contested on the Socialist Front ticket, and three were returned. The People's Progressive Party, centred in Perak, had a very dominant Indo-Ceylonese leadership, though it enjoyed Chinese support

in that state. Nine Indians and Ceylonese contested on the P.P.P. ticket, and two were returned. There were in all eight Indians in the 1959 Parliament. Three were nominated to the Senate in that year. The leader of the M.I.C. was again admitted to the Cabinet, with the portfolio of Posts and Telecommunications, and the deputy leader was made an assistant minister.

In the elections of 1964, the number of M.I.C. candidates nominated by the Alliance was reduced from four to three. This seat was given to the M.C.A. to compensate for the increase in their numerical strength in the electorate, while that of the Indians had remained static at 8 per cent. All three M.I.C. candidates were returned. Indians again featured in other contests as leaders of other parties. The Socialist Front had five Indians contesting, the P.P.P. had four, and the People's Action Party, a new party in Malaysian politics, had two on its ticket. A few of them were returned. Five Indians were nominated to the Senate. M.I.C. membership in the Cabinet was increased to two, the deputy leader being made Minister of Labour. In Sabah, the Sabah Indian Congress, a small party formed to bring together the few Indians in that state, was admitted to the Alliance, the governing party of the state. In 1964 one member of the Sabah Indian Congress was elected to the Sabah Legislative Assembly as an Alliance candidate.

Even though the M.I.C. exists as the self-proclaimed party of the Indians of Malaysia, a channel for all their political aspirations, there has been and is, as evidenced above, substantial political participation by Indians outside the M.I.C. Especially among the middle class, there is an increasing tendency to dissociate themselves from the M.I.C. and its communal orientation, and to partake in political activity on an ideological basis. Particularly note-worthy is the gravitation of the Indian intelligentsia towards radical parties of the left, propagating diverse brands of social democracy. Thus, parties such as the Labour Party, the Socialist Front coalition, the Democratic Action Party, and the People's Progressive Party have an active cadre of Indian leaders, and wide sympathy among Indian educated

groups. The success of Indians in these multi-racial political parties shows their capacity, and indeed the growing trend among them, to liberate themselves from communal ties and to participate in the political process on a wider spectrum. Such a trend would have spread more rapidly among them, but for the continuing existence of the M.I.C.

V | Trade Unionism and Labour Welfare after 1945

Indian labour in Malaya—on the plantations, in industry, and in the developmental and community services of the Government and public corporations—lived and worked in conditions that would have been ideal for the growth of class consciousness and hence of labour organizations. Yet the history of Indian labour in Malaya shows an almost complete absence of such organization until after the Second World War, whereas the Chinese formed numerous societies and associations to improve their industrial conditions. Many reasons have been advanced for this relative backwardness in labour organization among Indians. The British trade union experts, S. S. Awbery and F. W. Dalley, studying Malayan labour in 1948 made some observations on Tamil labour in an attempt to explain the difference in development between them and the Chinese. They said that the Tamils were more dependent, far more conservative in social habits, less hardy, and less individualistic than the Chinese.[1] These are generalizations on national character which are difficult to substantiate. But it is possible to argue that conditions governing the recruitment and employment of Indian labour fostered dependence and discouraged individuality.

The Indian labourer, from the time he made the decision to emigrate to Malaya, had someone to attend to his cares, and had things done for him. The whole process of shifting from his village to the depot, across the seas to Penang and thence to the estate, went on under the watchful eye of someone who was responsible for him. In the plantation, he

[1] S. S. Awbery and F. W. Dalley, *Labour and Trade Union Organisation in the Federation of Malaya and Singapore* (Kuala Lumpur, 1948).

was subject to a paternalistic authority at various levels. There was the European planter at the highest level, the Indian sub-managerial officers at a secondary level, and the *kangany* or *mandore* at the level nearest to him. His terms of service and his grievances regarding them were attended to by the Labour Department, with the Government of India and its Agent in Malaya holding a watching brief on his behalf. During this entire period he grew up in a situation where he had no necessity to take sustained action on his own behalf. If things become impossible, there was always the machinery of repatriation as a last resort.

When the Trade Union Ordinance of 1940 was passed, it became possible to establish lawfully registered bodies or combinations of workers in a trade, that could act in the interests of the industrial conditions of members. A number of Chinese communal organizations now registered as trade unions under the Act. No Indian workers' bodies sought to register in this way. There were Indian communal societies, no doubt, such as the caste, regional, and cultural associations, but none of these had the flexibility and the potential to extend themselves and take on new functions on behalf of their members. One factor may have been that membership of these bodies was not limited to labourers but included *kanganys*, and even clerks and other officers. The management would not have permitted the growth of a purely labour society on the estates for fear of the consequences that might follow. In any case, the labourers in these years would not have thought of forming a society without the patronage of some individuals of higher status.

The Great Depression and the experience of the Second World War produced major changes in the psychology and attitudes of the Indian labourer. The scope and character of these changes have already been discussed in some detail. It remains now to pick up the threads and continue the story as far as the growth of worker consciousness and, as a result, of organizational activity, are concerned. It has already been noted that just prior to the war the Indian working class was beginning to be contaminated by some of the militancy of the Chinese, resulting in industrial unrest

among the Indian work force. This growing militancy among Indian labourers was more politically oriented; it was nationalistic and anti-colonial. There were also the early beginnings of the tendency for extreme left-wing politicians to seek to influence working-class activity, basing themselves on a common anti-imperialist platform. All these factors were to continue to operate in the immediate post-war years.

It was those local leaders of the estate community who had been active in the I.N.A. and the Independence League who first emerged as the post-war labour leaders. The labourer was much better prepared now for collective activity. Nationalist emotions brought him closer to his compatriots, and the difficulties of the war had made him more hardy and less dependent. The paternal structure in the estates had collapsed with British withdrawal, and returning planters observed that it could not be exactly replaced in the same form. The Colonial Government was also much more positively disposed towards trade unionism. A Labour Government had been returned to power in 1945, and the British trade union movement was the special pride of the Labour Party. The Government did not take long to appoint a Trade Union Adviser in 1945 with a staff and a separate Department, to help foster responsible trade unionism in Malaya. So both official policy and labour attitudes were much more favourable to the growth of industrial organization among Indians after 1945.

As is not surprising in the early stages of worker organization, the movement in Malaya had a stormy beginning. It was subject to all kinds of influences seeking to channel it in different directions, producing confusion among an inexperienced band of leaders dedicated to the cause of trade unionism. Indian labour, like all Malayan labour, was subject to these conflicting ideological pulls, and passed through a difficult period in its attempt to arrive at some acceptable basis of labour organization. The most powerful of these influences was communism, seeking to impose its own ideologies on the labour movement, and to use it as a weapon in its political struggles. Soon after the war, the

Malayan Communist Party entered the trade union movement, trying to penetrate and control existing unions or to form new ones where this was not possible. It organized a General Labour Union, tightly controlled by the M.C.P., to which a multitude of diverse unions were affiliated, and through which they could be controlled. Later the G.L.U. was reorganized into the Singapore Federation of Trade Unions and the Pan Malayan Federation of Trade Unions.

Indian labour in the period 1945–7 was susceptible to communist propaganda. Communist leaders appeared as the only people taking an interest in labour welfare. Indian community leaders had not involved themselves in labour affairs yet. The extremist anti-imperialist views of the communists struck a chord with the labourers, who had been fed on such propaganda under Japanese occupation. Working conditions in the estates at this time were pretty bad. Housing facilities and welfare services had collapsed, and took time to rebuild. So when the M.C.P. presented itself as the champion of Indian labour, it was not surprising that the labourers responded to M.C.P. leadership. Volunteer Youth Corps or *Thondar Padai*, that had been active nationalist groups of the Independence League, were now indoctrinated with communism. A wave of unrest and even terror on the estates followed in 1946, leading to police intervention and repression.

The Government took alarm at the apparent success of M.C.P. labour policy, and passed a law in 1946 to tighten the supervision of trade unions. Along with repressive action against communist underground activities, the Government took measures to promote non-communist trade unionism. Union officials were given instruction in special courses. Pamphlets entitled *You and Your Union* were translated into Chinese, Tamil, and Malay, and distributed to labourers. A fortnightly newspaper devoted to trade union matters was published by the Public Relations Section of the Trade Union Adviser's Department. Field officers of the Department went around addressing Tamil workers in their own language. A Tamil play on trade unionism was written by officers of the Department, and was presented to audiences

of Tamil workers. Cinema shows of an educational character were screened on estates. A massive attempt was made to educate the Tamil workers and the budding labour leadership, and wean them away from ideologies of class hatred and class warfare.

When the M.C.P. was outlawed and driven underground, its hold on trade unionism was broken and the way was clear for the rise of other non-communist forms of leadership. Many communist-dominated unions were deregistered under the new law. Other unions which were fronts for communist activity collapsed when the secret guiding hand was removed. The M.C.P. had in any case found it much less easy to manage Indian than Chinese labour. The strong communal bond, the fundamentally religious attitude to life, the popularity of the Gandhian ideal of non-violence, and the traditional respect for authority had all been factors that stood in the way of regimenting Indian labour to the communist cause. So when the M.C.P. was outlawed, Indians generally, including those who had flirted with communism, shied away from it. There was a further factor that made it difficult for Indian and Chinese labour to be yoked together in the same front. The wages and service conditions of Chinese labour were uniformly better than those of Indians. This had gone unnoticed by Indians before the war because of the absence of contact between the two communities. Now it was becoming a major grievance, especially as the arguments about the different character of recruitment and migration conditions used to justify these differences now lost their validity.

With the downfall of communist-controlled unions, the way was open for the rise of unions of other types. The main move was in the direction of communally organized unions, or unions of trades with an obvious preponderance of Indians. Of the former type were the Negri Sembilan Indian Labour Union (formed in 1947) and the Perak Indian Workers' Union. The Perak Estate Employees' Union, the Johore State Plantation Workers' Union the Alor Gaja Labour Union, and the Malacca Estate Employees' Union, though formed on a territorial and

industrial basis, were unions with fully Indian membership. Communally organized unions tried to preserve their independence from the Pan Malayan Federation of Trade Unions, and resisted communist attempts at penetrating them. From this struggle there emerged a band of leaders who were now proficient in the communist technique of penetrating trade unions, and they helped to foster an independent trade union movement in Malaya.

The growth of trade unionism among Indian labour was retarded by several factors operating during the emergency. Emergency regulations, curtailing free movement and organization, hindered activity. Any labour militancy or activism was suspected of communism, and frowned upon by Government and public opinion. Indian plantation labour was suspect because of its proneness to communist propaganda in 1946, and because plantations situated adjacent to the jungle could become supply points for terrorists who took cover there. Estate management, which had never been friendly to trade unionism, could now freely indulge its hostility towards any incipient tendencies on the estates, and was helped by a police force with wide powers, suspicious of any forms of organized activity. After the unrest of 1946 in the estates, labourers tended to be fearful of any activism, and incipient labour leaders had to lie low. The committed communists had either fled to the jungle or were in custody. Just as there was fear of Governmental and management authority, there was equally fear of the terrorists. Anyone known to be active in forming unions that were anti-communist and who co-operated with the Government in any way was in danger of being murdered or kidnapped. The terrorists committed many such acts of reprisal as a lesson to others.

The growing pressure of industrial factors necessitated the strengthening of trade unionism, in spite of the above handicaps. From early 1949 the rubber industry was faced with the problem of falling prices. Planters were threatening to cut wages to lower costs. Negotiations were begun by the six major unions representing estate labour in the various states. These negotiations brought the unions together, and

demonstrated the need for unity among them. The Trade Union Adviser's Office was constantly pressing them to amalgamate in order to function more effectively. The Negri Sembilan Indian Labour Union, as among the most efficiently organized estate unions, took the lead in the move towards unity. It had a dynamic young leadership deeply attached both to independent trade unionism and to the upliftment of the Indians. It changed its name to Plantation Workers' Union of South Malaya, and in 1951 decided to amalgamate into a Federation with other unions. The first stage of amalgamation was reached when the Plantation Workers' Union of Malaya was formed. Gradually the P.W.U.M. spread itself into other states, offering a challenge to the old established unions to unite with them to provide a strong body that would be a powerful force in the rubber industry. Attempts at unity met with opposition and obstacles from the entrenched leadership groups in state unions, who did not want to lose their power and status to a large amalgamated body. In states where there were strong unions, such as Johore and Perak, unity was delayed. In 1953, the Malacca Estate Employees' Union agreed to join with the P.W.U.M. The amalgamation of these unions was given official approval when the High Commissioner addressed the Annual Conference of 1953.

The movement towards a single union for plantation labour was now irreversible. It was accelerated by the poor conditions of the rubber industry in 1952–3 when wage cuts were approved by an arbitration tribunal. In the vital negotiations that took place in 1949 to 1954, the important unions functioned through an *ad hoc* body called the Negotiating Committee of Rubber Workers' Unions. It was a purely advisory committee that had to refer back every major decision to the constituent unions. It was a cumbersome procedure for negotiations, as was soon recognized by all parties concerned: planters, Government, and the unions themselves. In June 1954, the P.W.U.M. and five other large unions of plantation labour in the states entered into an agreement to amalgamate. In September, a delegates' conference was held and the new body, the

National Union of Plantation Workers, was inaugurated. This was a major landmark in the history of Malayan trade unionism, and, even more important, in the progress and prospects of Indian plantation labour.

At its inauguration, the N.U.P.W. had 80,000 members. Thereafter, it went from strength to strength, retaining and expanding its position and functions as the largest single trade union in Malaya. It was from the beginning very keen on emphasizing its independence of political or ideological commitment, and especially to dissociate itself from left-wing philosophies. It established connexions with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions formed to bring together non-communist unions, and divert them from the communist-oriented World Federation of Trade Unions. It participates in the annual conferences of the I.C.F.T.U. and maintains close ties with this body. This politically centrist position is important in the context of the Malayan situation. Malayan emergency regulations had outlawed communism, and law-enforcing authorities looked with extreme caution on any activity remotely connected with left-wing policies and aims. The anti-communist policy was continued by the national Government of independent Malaya after 1957. The leadership of the N.U.P.W. successfully walked the political tightrope, and secured an image for itself as a responsible, non-political union interested only in the welfare of its members. Thus the union was able to win the confidence of Government, both colonial and national, and now enjoys a good deal of political influence which it is careful to utilize only for its own limited objectives.

After 1945, an increasing number of Chinese and Malays sought employment in the plantations. Thus by 1963, Indians formed 49 per cent of the estate labour force, while the Chinese and Malays formed 27·6 per cent and 23 per cent, respectively. This in turn affected the membership and policies of the union. It had started off as a predominantly Indian activity with an exclusively Indian leadership. Though formed round a trade, it had been to all intents and purposes a communal union. But if it was to continue to function effectively in the industry it had to enrol all

races to its membership, and make appropriate accommodation in its leadership. This it set about doing with increasing speed after independence. In 1963, a racial breakdown of its membership of 241,505 showed: Indians 124,591 (51·59 per cent), Malays 68,105 (28·2 per cent), Chinese 46,592 (19·29 per cent), others 2,217 (0·92 per cent).[2] The union appears to have had more success in the enrolment of Malays than Chinese. Malays also now feature in executive positions. As a further attempt at integration, Malay, as the national language, is now used at the meetings of the Executive Committee. All the union's publications, notices, and brochures are issued in all three languages, Malay, Chinese, and Tamil. Inter-communal relations in plantation labour has been a touchy problem after 1945. Reference was made above to the formation of communal unions because of the differing conditions of service between communities. Employers took advantage of these differences and, during periods of wage dispute and strike action, they did not hesitate to use labour of one community to foil the claims of another. When Indian labour had become well organized under the N.U.P.W., and its Indian leaders showed militancy, planters became hostile towards them and began to show preference for non-Indian labour. All these factors made the work of the N.U.P.W. difficult, and demanded extreme tact from its leaders.

Problems were particularly acute in the union's relations with Chinese labourers. They were generally hostile to trade unions after what they had suffered in the early years of the emergency. Later they formed their own union, the Pan Malayan Rubber Workers' Union. When the N.U.P.W. took industrial action, this union would instruct its Chinese membership not to comply, as it was not in agreement with the objectives of the N.U.P.W. Language and social barriers prevented the forging of close links between Indian and Chinese labourers as were being established between Indians and Malays. The N.U.P.W. still maintains its predominantly Indian leadership in the absence of union leaders of stature from the other two communities. How long it will continue

[2] Federation of Malaya, *Annual Report of the Trade Union Registry*, 1963.

to remain so is problematic, especially in view of the fact that now about 50 per cent of its membership is non-Indian.

Under its present leadership the N.U.P.W. has developed as a sound trade union. It has eight branches distributed in the various states, and a staff of over 140 full-time paid officials. It has put up a building in Kuala Lumpur to house its national headquarters, appropriately called Plantation House. Apart from the Secretary, all other administrative officers are elected by the membership. Regular meetings at branch and central level make for the smooth functioning of the organization, without the growth of powerful cabals in the centre. Emphasis is placed on personal contact with members. Visits are made to estates at least once in three months. The staff in the headquarters has grown in quantity and quality to cope with the widening horizons of the union's activities. A Research Department was opened to keep the economic situation and the price levels of plantation produce in constant review. It collects information on wages, labour laws, and service conditions in all parts of the world. It prepares a detailed case for the union officials in their negotiations with employers. There is a Public Relations Department which deals with publicity and information, both among members and the general public. Among its functions is the running of regular periodicals in English, Tamil, Malay, and Chinese. An Industrial Relations Department and a Legal Department were opened to deal with these aspects in a more specialized manner.

The union's prime achievement, and hence its major impact on a numerically large segment of the Indian population, has been its struggle to secure a steady improvement of wages and conditions of service. It was the struggle for higher wages in the early 1950s that brought about the amalgamation of several unions into one large body. The fluctuations in the price of rubber in these years made employers cut wages with every lowering of price. In 1953 the matter went for arbitration to the Taylor Wages Tribunal where an award was given so patently unfavourable to labour that the union refused to accept it and prepared

for strike action. Happily the price of rubber picked up in June 1954, and wages were correspondingly upgraded. The amalgamation of unions into the N.U.P.W. took place in September 1954, and the labourer was now in a better position to bargain with his employer. In August 1955 a Joint Consultative Council for the Malayan planting industry was inaugurated, with representation from planters and the union. The union was in every respect able to match up to the employers, who were organized in the Malayan Planting Industries Employers' Association. Henceforth collective bargaining was carried on at national level by the N.U.P.W. on behalf of its members.

In 1955 the export duty on rubber was increased, and the employers took this as an opportunity to revise wages in such a way that part of the increased burden might be passed on to the labourers. The union opposed this strongly, and put forward as a counter-claim that wages should take account of the price of rubber going over 1 dollar per pound. The schedule of wages agreed to only took account of price variations up to a dollar. The employers gave in to the union, and in August 1955 an agreement was signed on wage rates calculated on the gross price of rubber.[3]

In 1956 the union launched a major offensive to revise the whole wage structure of the rubber industry. It asserted that the whole principle of hitching wages to the selling price of rubber was wrong. This was tantamount to transferring the losses to the labourer without giving him a share in the profits. The union put forward the principle that wages should be based on a level that would allow the labourer and his dependants to lead a decent life and to provide for his old age. In March 1956 it presented a memorandum to the M.P.I.E.A. setting out the details of the cost of living of a labourer's family based on a diet of minimum nutritive value. It demanded a basic wage of 4.50 dollars per day for field workers, with further increases for various categories of tappers. The employers rejected these demands which they felt were extravagant. Protracted

[3] K. K. Kumaran, *Collective Bargaining in the Rubber Industry* (Kuala Lumpur, 1967), p. 7.

negotiations ensued, and the Labour Department sought to use its good offices to prevent a breakdown in the industry. The union reduced its demands to a minimum rate of 3.25 dollars a day. When the employers showed no signs of making any concessions, the union decided on industrial action. It first instructed members to carry on a go-slow policy, i.e. to perform only the minimum allotted task and to take as much time over it as possible. They were not to work overtime, or to work on a rainy day. They were all to take their weekly day of rest when it was due. In this way they were to hamper production. Feelings between labour and management ran high in many estates as the latter took counter-measures to beat the go-slow. Communal differences were exploited to the utmost. Even public opinion, unaware of the issues involved, was hostile to industrial militancy, with the events of the emergency fresh in its mind. To arrest a worsening situation, the union was forced to sign an agreement in June 1956 which conceded only a slight wage increase over the previous year's agreement, and secured some fringe benefits.[4] They did not win their fight to make wages independent of rubber prices.

In 1958 the union renewed its demand for a standard wage independent of the price of rubber. It put forward a schedule of rates for various categories of labour which were again much higher than the existing rates. Again the planters rejected the union demand, and protracted negotiations ensued. The union decided to take industrial action and took a strike ballot among its members. Finally an agreement was reached in which the employers partially conceded the principle of the union scheme. The new rates were determined on the stabilized wage structure the union wanted as well as on incentives, which the employers wanted to retain, and would appeal to the Chinese section of the labour force. A new set of demands was presented by the union in April 1961. Again after much negotiation and on the intervention of the Ministry of Labour an agreement was signed in February 1962. It secured increases of about 20 to 30 cents per day to tappers and field-workers.[5]

[4] Ibid., pp. 8–13. [5] Ibid., p. 21.

In August 1963, the union again put forward its claims for increased wages and other privileges. Negotiations dragged on for eleven months and were in danger of breaking down. The union took a strike ballot, and on a favourable vote decided to call a strike of its members on 20 May 1964. It staged a pilot one day strike on 8 May. The Department of Labour intervened, and persuaded both parties to submit the dispute to mediation. An agreement was reached on the basis of the recommendations of the mediator in July 1964. By the agreement the basic daily wage of tappers was increased by 30 cents. The minimum poundage required from each tapper was reduced, and the payment based on output was increased. It represented an additional average income of 17 per cent to tappers. Field-workers similarly got increases for all three categories of adults, females, and children of about 15 per cent.[6] By this slow and long drawn-out process, the earnings of the labourer have been increasing since 1944, thanks to the constant efforts of the union on his behalf. This has resulted in a rise in his general standards of life and comfort. Though a good deal of attention was centred on rubber workers because of their enormous numbers, the union has negotiated increased wages for other plantation workers in the tea, coconut, and oil palm estates.

Another matter that the union took up, pertinent to the life of the labourers, was the question of holidays. The union wanted the number of paid holidays per year to be increased to fourteen in addition to the religious festivals and public holidays. They also wanted a weekly rest day to be formalized by agreement, and if the labourer worked on that day he was to be paid overtime rates. When the question was discussed in 1956, the employers refused to offer more than five days of paid holiday per year, but when the union took its stand on the I.L.O. Convention on this subject they increased their offer to seven days. They refused the request for a regular fixed rest day in the week because of the special needs of the plantation industry, but agreed to a seventh day off after six consecutive days of work. The union

[6] Ibid., pp. 21–39.

was keen on a fixed day off so that labourers could better organize their social life. There were obvious advantages in the entire labour force being free on one day of the week; their communal and recreational activities could be better arranged. The union went on pressing for this, and achieved it in 1964 when the Sunday holiday was extended to the plantations. At the same time the number of paid holidays was increased to nineteen days per year. Other benefits, such as increased eligibility for sick leave with pay and paid leave for T.B. patients, were incorporated. This agreement of 1964 caused favourable improvements to social life in the plantations.

The N.U.P.W. was concerned not only with industrial questions but also functioned with a great deal of effectiveness as an instrument of social welfare. Its leadership at all levels, from the national executive to the representative in each estate division, has always been moved by a purposeful sense of Indian upliftment. Towards this end a great deal of the union's activities have been directed. It runs a Tamil bi-weekly paper called *Sangamani* which is found in all its branch offices on estates, and through which it educates labour opinion on union as well as social matters. The paper is widely read on estates and is an important opinion former. Since its formation in 1954 the union has tackled diverse social problems of the Indian labourer. More recently it has put forward concerted national plans of social welfare.

One of the problems that has always confronted the Indian labourer is the lack of opportunities for acquisition of land in this country. Various facets of this problem—its acuteness after the Depression, the apathy of governmental and estate authority, and the few successful schemes of colonization—were discussed earlier. The Ramanathapuram scheme, started in 1932 and flourishing today, showed what could be done. Now the N.U.P.W. took up the question. The Secretary of the M.P.W.U. (as it then was) Mr. P. P. Narayanan, attempted to push forward a scheme for land alienation to Indians in 1953, and had the sympathy and support of the High Commissioner. By the end of that year nearly 5,000 acres had been given to 1,000 Indian families.

In 1955, Narayanan put up a proposal to settle all Indian workers on the land, thus making them a settled agricultural community with part-time employment on the estates. These would be tappers' villages adjoining the estates. Planters were opposed to the idea of taking the labourer away from the plantation. The alienation of state land continued, but there were always far more applicants than land. It was suggested that the Indian Immigration Fund, which had now been converted into the South Indian Labour Fund, could be used for land settlement, but nothing came of these proposals.

Another major evil of the plantation labour system was the absence of provision for labourers in old age and retirement. Elderly labourers often depended on the charity of their children and relatives, and sometimes took refuge in the few Homes for Decrepits. Repatriation to India has been enormously reduced and is gradually disappearing. The N.U.P.W. took up the question of insurance and gratuities for old age. It started its own scheme of insurance against old age, accident, and death in 1958. Of the interest on the premium, 3 per cent was put into a Scholarship Fund for estate workers' children.

The union has also been increasingly interested in the education of the children of estate workers. It started a programme of direct aid to education in 1962. The sum set apart for this purpose has been steadily increased. The aid takes the form of supporting a certain number of children through secondary school in many parts of the country. Grants to meet school fees, cost of transport, cost of books, and uniforms are made. In 1963 the assistance was extended to cover university education. Bright children of estate workers who could obtain admission to university were given financial assistance towards the cost of their education. To extend opportunities for the children of its members, the union put up a hostel in the capital city of Kuala Lumpur. These children could reside here while they attended schools in the city and university. It enables children to leave small towns and villages with poor schools, and take advantages of better facilities in the capital. Yet the union itself recognizes

that all these only touch on the fringe of the problem of the education of labourers' children. Other basic structural deficiencies in the educational system have make the number of children climbing the educational ladder infinitesimal indeed. The union hostel has only a small proportion of the available accommodation filled by workers' children.

The union has been active in adult education, in fashioning the attitudes of its members, and developing a consciousness among them. It does this by organizing lectures, showing films, and planning sports and cultural entertainment. The message in all these activities is the effectiveness of organization and self-help. Workers are exhorted to join the union to help themselves. Because of the large proportion of illiterates among its members, it has had to resort extensively to audio-visual forms of education and instruction. The union takes these responsibilities seriously. Through these media it also seeks to instruct the labourer in better ways of life and habits, and in generally more civilized conduct.

One of the more specific roles of reformist activity the union has accepted concerns the problem of toddy-drinking among labourers. This has always been a social evil on the estates, attracting different kinds of reform movements. The union used its influence with the workers to educate them towards temperance. Officials of the union saw that toddy took away a substantial part of the worker's income, and was the cause of much suffering to his family. It hindered his participation in union activity because it made him apathetic towards his working and living conditions, and drained him of any energy to work for their improvement. Local union officials were active temperance workers, and at times even held unofficial courts to try and punish habitual drunkards. They would hold propaganda meetings and get the audience at the end of the meeting to take an oath in the presence of the deity of the temple (where the meeting was usually held) not to drink toddy any more. When local option polls were held in accordance with the recommendations of the Toddy Shop Committee of 1947, officials of the union were active in campaigning for an adverse vote, thus effecting the closure of toddy shops in many estates.

The union also helped members to manage their own affairs in the social and recreational spheres. These had for long been run for them by their superiors—officers and *kanganys*. A typical example was the temple *panchayat* or managing committee. After the expansion of trade unions, labourers began to demand a greater share in these *panchayats*. In some places the *panchayat* and local union branch were at loggerheads, representing two different types of authority, one hierarchical, the other democratic. More and more, under pressure of union officials and the threat of boycotting temple activities, their managing committees began to be elected. Then union and *panchayat* worked together for the welfare of the community. Union officials were often advocates of reform in religious beliefs and practices. They were responsible for stopping many archaic and offensive practices in estate worship. They even interfered in the domestic relations of labourers. They arbitrated, often with good effect, in marriage disputes and other quarrels between members, thus displacing the manager, labour officer, and *kangany*, who had previously functioned in this manner. All in all, participation in union activities taught the labourers self-help and served as an important exercise in democracy and leadership.

Labour leaders were able to work their way up from local union office to district, state, and finally national executives. At the national level, they were able to have an impact on national politics, and secure national recognition. Thus trade unionism gave one of the few opportunities for upward social mobility. It is true, though, that in such a large union there is a tendency for leadership groups to entrench themselves at the centre. There is always the danger of the growth of personality cults, to which the Indian is particularly prone. The paternalism of the planter and the labour officer may be replaced by the paternalism of the union officials. The one major deterrent to this is the awakening of consciousness among workers. The history of estate labour society after the war is a history of the growth of social consciousness. This was revealed at times of industrial trouble, when the union was engaged in acrimonious disputes with the planters.

It was seen time and again that the Indian labour rank and file was more militant than their leaders, and constantly pressed them to take strike action in favour of their claims. They followed wage disputes carefully, and refused wage packets when they felt that what was paid was below their legitimate dues. Workers in the estate or division would take collective action the moment they sensed a grievance, such action being directed against all grades of authority over them—European planter, Asian officer, *kangany*, or *mandore*. In this way every year many man hours are lost in the rubber industry, and it is the prompt intervention of the union branch officer that prevents the situation from deteriorating.

The N.U.P.W. has developed contacts with international trade unionism. It is affiliated to the International Federation of Plantation, Agricultural and Allied Workers. Its leaders frequently attend seminars in different parts of the world, and sometimes play host to regional study groups. The union has been able to secure scholarships for its officials to study in trade union colleges in the United Kingdom, Australia, and India. The Secretary, P. P. Narayanan, is a well-known figure in international labour forums, and has been honoured in many ways in different parts of the world.

Being far and away the largest and best organized trade union in Malaysia, the influence of the N.U.P.W. on the growth of trade unionism in this country cannot be exaggerated. Both in this union and outside it, Indians have made a disproportionate contribution to this growth. This is due to two broad factors. First, Indian plantation labour was a large homogenous group in one industry, that lent itself to effective organization. When this was done, it was only natural that a strong union would spearhead similar developments in other sectors. Secondly, the Indian educated class appears to have channelled its organizational talents into trade union activity. After 1945 a number of these people made themselves available as an organizational cadre moving not only into trades employing a number of Indians, but also into predominantly non-Indian labour forces. This happened both in the Federation and in Singapore, where

from 1946 onwards a number of unions appeared with a predominant Indian leadership. Some of these leaders tended ideologically towards communism, and after the emergency they and their unions were weeded out. Many others remained in the movement to struggle for non-communist trade unionism in the difficult years of the emergency.

Indians feature prominently in the movement to link the trade unions of Malaya, and weld them into a unity with shared experiences and aspirations. A Trade Union Council was formed in March 1950 with an Indian-dominated executive. The President was P. P. Narayanan, then active in organizing plantation workers in Negri Sembilan; the Secretary was E. E. Nathan, and the Treasurer, M. P. Rajagopal. Indian leaders were at the same time busy organizing railway employees of various grades, Government employees of different categories, and teachers. They offered their assistance in organizing workers in mining, factories, and other trades where Indians were not involved. The Trade Union Council was transformed into the Trade Union Congress, and in its affairs the N.U.P.W., as the largest single constituent unit, played a key role. A mission from the International Labour Office, studying the trade union situation in Malaya, commented on the great preponderance of Indians in union-organized labour. In September 1961, of the total membership of Malayan trade unions 65 per cent were Indian, while Malays and Chinese accounted for 21 per cent and 16 per cent, respectively. It was noted that the relatively insufficient participation by Chinese and Malays was a drawback to trade unionism in the country.[7]

In Singapore, though there is no large Indian labour force comparable to Malaya, Indian leadership in trade unionism is not without significance. Some of the best Indian trade unionists were suspect of communism, and have felt the repressive measures of both the colonial and the national Governments. Among the unions which grew in importance was the Municipal Labour Federation with a large Indian

[7] I.L.O., *The Trade Union Situation in the Federation of Malaya: Report of a mission from the International Labour Office* (Geneva, 1962), p. 34.

membership. This union was reformist in its aims and activities, and was responsible for improving the standards of life of its members, a large proportion of whom belonged to the depressed castes. It was also active in adult and child education, opening and managing its own schools. Indian trade unionists organized employees of the British War and Admiralty Departments, and various grades of clerical officers. Through their trade union activity, Indian leaders have risen to positions of influence in the governing People's Action Party, and have been elected to Parliament and given office in the Government.

In the 1950s, a problem that could have serious consequences for Indian plantation labour unfolded itself. This was the tendency towards subdivision of estates. With the declaration of emergency and political unrest in the country, some of the European rubber companies began to sell their estates or parts of them. They were either sold in small subdivided lots, or were bought by local capitalists and land speculators, and sold in lots to a number of small-holders. What had begun as a tiny cloud on the horizon expanded to threatening proportions with the announcement of plans to grant independence to Malaya. It was estimated by a Committee in 1963 that about 9 per cent of the total acreage under rubber was affected by subdivision. The estates so affected were spread through all districts of the plantation country.

The N.U.P.W. had observed the ill-effects of subdivision on its members, and through its Research Department had accumulated evidence on such effects. But it could not attract national attention to the problem so long as the facts were not widely known. In response to the union's request, a Committee to inquire into subdivision of estates was set up in 1957 and reported in December of that year.[8] It recorded some of the social and economic ill-effects, but did not consider these serious enough for Government interference. It was felt on balance that the process of subdivision brought beneficial results to the country at

[8] Federation of Malaya, *Report on the Subdivision and Fragmentation of Estates*, December 1957.

large. It was claimed to bring into existence a class of smallholders, owning and operating small plots of rubber land. Thus, ownership of this produce vital to the country's economy was being transferred from foreign to national hands. Even more important, it was calling into existence a class of peasant proprietors, with a stake in the land, thus contributing to the country's stability. The process was held to appease an innate land hunger in rural Malaya. These were vague, though attractive, generalizations, not based on statistical evidence but on superficial impressions. The acceptance of these impressions and the complaisant attitude thus encouraged were detrimental to the Indians, as the group most adversely affected by the onward move of subdivision.

After the Committee had reported in 1957, subdivision went on at an even more rapid pace in the following year, and continued till 1960. The union had by now gathered more detailed evidence on the long-term social effects that were beginning to show, and on the immediate effects on its members. The Government appointed another Committee in 1963. Its terms were 'to consider the present extent of subdivision of estates and to assess its effects on employment, health, and economy of the country, bearing in mind that genuine fragmentation also has social advantages in the sense that it increases the number of smallholders who would thereby possess a stake in the country'. The last part of the terms of reference showed the persistence of the old viewpoint in Government thinking on the subject. The Committee commissioned the Department of Economics of the University of Malaya to investigate the problem. A team headed by Professor Ungku Aziz went into all aspects related to the process of subdividing estates, and issued a monumental report complete with statistical evidence.[9] The conclusions of Professor Aziz's report were accepted by the Committee who framed their recommendations accordingly.

Marshalling a weight of statistical data, Professor Aziz disposed of the myth of land hunger as a cause of subdivision.

[9] Ungku Aziz, *Subdivision of Estates in Malaya 1951–1960*, 3 Vols. (Kuala Lumpur, 1963).

Subdivision of estates was creating not a class of peasant proprietors but rather of absentee landlords and urban investors in land. Hence it was not a progressive or a desirable economic development. There was now a considerable body of evidence to attest the effects on Indian estate labour. The first and immediate effect was unemployment. A large proportion of labour in a subdivided estate was thrown out of employment. The smaller units were operated by casual labour, or leased out to families in the neighbourhood who worked on it themselves. If the new owners needed labour they would look for it in the Malay village close by, where they could pay cheaper rates. This, unlike Indian labour, was non-union labour, would accept low rates, and was not in a position to bargain. Older people among the displaced Indians would find it difficult to get any alternative employment, thus adding to destitution in this community.

Even more serious than unemployment in the estate Indian community was the dislocation of a wide range of institutional and social amenities in the subdivided estates. Workers' quarters, roads, and bridges were not properly maintained. Hospitals, dispensaries and clinics, schools and recreational facilities, and even water supplies deteriorated and were sometimes totally abandoned. A perceptible decline followed in the levels of living of estate labour. Their health declined with the deterioration of health services, and they lost their religious and educational amenities. The labour code which required employers to maintain these facilities was only applicable to estates of over 100 acres. Sometimes there was a contrived subdivision of estates under a single ownership to units of below 100 acres, in order to escape the obligations of the labour code. Labourers who were members of the N.U.P.W. ceased to be members after the estate was subdivided because they knew the union could no longer look after their interests. None of the wage rates and service conditions that had been negotiated for them with planters of the M.P.I.E.A. now applied. As every new estate came up for sale, the transaction left a trail of doom to its Indian labour force.

The Committee, reporting in 1963, recommended strong

legislation to prevent subdivision. Such legislation should control the terms under which plantations of over 100 acres could change ownership. It should oblige the new owners to maintain all existing capital assets and amenities. The Committee also requested the Government to launch a rehabilitation programme to remedy the ill-effects of previous subdivision.[10] The N.U.P.W. has all along pressed for such legislation. It felt that the legislation should be based on the Ceylon experience which appeared relevant. There an act was passed in 1958, the Tea and Rubber Estates (Control of Fragmentation) Act, which put an end to subdivision. The Government did not want to go so far, wedded as it was to a free enterprise economy with the minimum of state interference over the rights of property. Communal factors also complicated the situation. A large majority of the new owners of divided estates were Chinese. Chinese capitalists were in large measure engaged in land speculation. The European and Chinese planting representatives on the Committee had written a minority report disagreeing with the need to legislate to control subdivision. Supporters of Chinese planting interests in the Government pulled against accepting the Committee's recommendations. The Government took the view that the provisions of the existing land laws were adequate to deal with the problem. These laws required new owners of property to continue the maintenance of social and other amenities on the land. But the union argued that the law as it stood was woefully inadequate. Subdivision continued after 1963, and is a major issue today in the Indian community. It divides Indian trade unionist leadership from the political leadership. The latter does not agree on the need for drastic legislation but looks to other ways of solving the problem.

For many years now there have been attempts to introduce the co-operative idea among Indian labour. But the Co-operative movement did not make much headway for a long time. The pre-war efforts were limited to Credit Co-operatives. Relative to the size of the Indian labour

[10] Federation of Malaya, *Majority Report of the Subdivision of Estates Committee*, 11 April 1963.

force, these co-operatives had not penetrated widely. In recent times, there has been a significant attempt to found a different type of national co-operative society for the labourers. This was the National Land Finance Co-operative Society Ltd., formed in 1960. The project appears to have captured the imagination of plantation workers. It was initiated by a politically-influential section of Indian leadership, and was closely associated with the Malayan Indian Congress. Its founder and president was the leader of the M.I.C. High officers of the party were among the executives of the Society. It thus had Government blessing and assistance, and the advantage of publicity and popularity that its sponsors were able to secure.

The idea behind the project was to tackle the problem of landlessness and unemployment among plantation labour through co-operation. Through the Society, the meagre savings of as large a body of workers as possible would be pooled together, and the funds so accumulated would be used to purchase rubber estates that were being offered for sale. Thus their subdivision would be avoided and the estate would be run as a unit by the Society. To join the Society and take out a share of 100 dollars the labourer had to pay ten instalments at the rate of 10 dollars a month, a sum which could be deducted from his wages. The Society thus had a dual objective of encouraging the saving habit of the labourer and of attempting a solution to the dangers that faced him in the way of subdivision.

As a result of the powerful forces that initiated it and the enthusiasm it generated, the Society got off to a good start and expanded rapidly. From the time it was launched and legally registered in June 1960, its leader, Dato V. T. Sambanthan, worked untiringly to popularize it in all estates, and by August 1961 was able to enrol 15,000 members with a total capital of over 1 million dollars. This was indeed a great achievement and was hailed by all sections of Malayan leadership. The Society could now acquire its first rubber plantation, which it did in August 1961 when it bought the Bukit Sidim Estate of 2,900 acres for a sum of about 3 million dollars. Thereafter its membership

continued to increase year by year and at the end of 1967 stood at 54,200. It went on acquiring estates as they came up for sale, and now owns twelve estates with a total acreage of over 30,000.

The estates that are bought are generally continued under the management of the agency that was previously managing their affairs. The staff is retained intact, now as employees of the Society. A dividend is declared at the end of the year, and generally about 75 per cent of it is ploughed back into the Society. There is no doubt about the prosperity of the workers in these estates and their changed attitude to work. It has been noted that productivity has increased after change of owners. Overall profits in Society-owned estates have been good every year, and dividends of 10 per cent are declared. Each new purchase of an estate is celebrated formally, with the entire leadership participating and plenty of fanfares. Indians attend in large numbers, and hear the message of their leaders exhorting them that such schemes of self-help are the only means of ensuring the future prosperity of the Indian labourer. Accounts of these functions and the speeches made are reported in full in the Tamil national dailies.

The Society has plans to expand its activities in other fields. A pilot project has already been started in one of the Society's estates to experiment with market gardening. The long-term objective is to reduce the dependence of the Indian labourer on the rubber industry, whose future in Malaysia is uncertain. Experiments are being made to use land on which only rubber grew for the cultivation of vegetables and cereals with marketing potentialities. The Society has proposals to extend its benefits to members. Such benefits are to include *ex gratia* payments for funeral and marriage expenses of members' families, transport facilities through the society's vans and buses to take children to school, and the sale of goods to members at wholesale prices.

The close connexion with a political party, the M.I.C., right from the Society's inauguration, has caused some doubts among different groups of people. There are those

who feel that the co-operative should be free of political interference or attachment, particularly one which is limited to members of one community. As the Society has a leadership which corresponds to the leadership of the M.I.C., they wonder what would happen if the uncertainties of politics topple the M.I.C. from its present position of power and influence. Would the Society and its affairs decline with a declining M.I.C.? This political orientation has also offended trade union circles. They feel that the Society and its activities under M.I.C. leadership are weaning labourers away from their attachment and loyalty to their unions. The Society is taking over functions which are best performed by a trade union. The impression is created that the M.I.C., standing behind the Society, and the N.U.P.W. are vying with each other for the labourer's loyalty. The leadership of the N.U.P.W. had given formal support to the Society at its inauguration and for the next two years thereafter. But in December 1962 the N.U.P.W. woke up to this threat and attacked the concept of the Society in its Annual Report.[11] The Report declared: 'The N.U.P.W. will be prepared to come out in support of the National Land Finance Co-operative Society if the Society will openly state that it is not a political baby but it is a co-operative society in every sense of the word dictated and guided by its own directors and would orientate its policy by the philosophy of the co-operative movement in this country.' Since then it has been discouraging its members from joining the Society. The union feels that the M.I.C. leadership is confusing the issue of fragmentation of estates by its sponsorship of the Co-operative Society. It feels that the buying of a few estates that are up for sale is only a palliative to the major problem of the future of the rubber industry and the Indian labourer.

This dispute is most unfortunate because of what the Society has achieved, and can achieve with more support. The Indian labourer could do with efforts many times the size of this, and with the assistance of all organizations and

[11] National Union of Plantation Workers, *2nd Triennial Report for 1959–1962* (Plantation House, Petaling Jaya, 1962), pp. 16–17.

individuals prepared to work for him. By this debilitating conflict between the N.U.P.W. and the M.I.C., the labourer is the ultimate loser. Association with the Society has certainly made the M.I.C. more purposive and constructive. Previously it had few or no roots among labour; labour's undisputed voice was the N.U.P.W. Through the Society, the M.I.C. has established contacts with labour. Through local branches of the Society, and the distribution of offices and patronage, the M.I.C. has won some support from labour and strengthened itself.

In this way, trade unions, the Co-operative movement, other public bodies, and political parties have left a marked impact on Indian labour by their activities on its behalf. Great advances have been made in the past two decades. But as present problems are solved, new issues make their appearance. It is difficult to say what the outlook and prospects for plantation labour will be in the years to come.

VI | Religion and Social Reform

Among Indian communities overseas religious institutions were firmly established from the very first periods of settlement. About 80 per cent of Indian immigrants to Malaya were Hindus. It may be assumed that today this proportion of the Indian population are Hindus. Immigrant plantation labour had temples built for them in the estates, to establish for them a homely environment. An ancient Tamil adage said: Do not settle in a land where there is no temple. The isolation of Indians in the estates, and their concentration in small groups in their housing settlements, led to the practice of Hindu forms and ceremonies in a manner approximating as closely as possible to that in India. In urban areas, this was more difficult. But it speaks for the persistence of the religious element in the Indian tradition that cities and towns with some Indian concentrations soon had Hindu temples and shrines. The middle class was rather late in wanting to found religious institutions in this country. Those of the second generation positively shied away from open adherence to Hindu practices. The increasing migration of educated Indians in the first two decades of the twentieth century led to some determined attempts to found well-organized temples in urban areas. As was natural, new immigrants were far more keen on preserving the Indian tradition, and many of the successful religious ventures are the result of their efforts.

Broadly, two types of Hindu religious institutions were established. There were the more numerous shrines of modest proportions devoted to the village deities of popular Hinduism. In this category came almost all temples in estates, and the shrines built near the vicinity of labour

lines in cities and towns. Worship and ceremony in such temples were in keeping with the diversified traditions of folk religion, lacking in scriptural uniformity or universality. Then there were the large temples dedicated to the universal gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon. These were generally more elaborate structures, built with contributions from the professional and commercial classes, and managed by committees among them. Many of these temples were constructed through the munificence of the Chettyar, a community deeply entrenched in Saivite Hindu religious tradition. In these temples, worship was carried out according to the scriptural texts by Brahmin priests well-versed in ritual, and brought from India specifically for this purpose by the managers of the temples. Ceylon Tamils also undertook the construction of temples and maintenance of Hindu institutions. They were a community of piety and devotion, and their relative affluence and education enabled them to manage these institutions well.

Temples were managed by *panchayats* appointed in various ways. In the estates, *panchayats* were formed out of Asian Hindu staff and *kanganys*, under the watchful eye of the management. Labourers had no participation in management, though they were by far the most numerous users of the estate temple. In urban temples there were many methods by which *panchayats* were constituted. Where a temple was built by a family or a caste group such as the Chettyar, management was vested in members of that family and their descendants, or important members of that caste. In many other temples which were built by public contributions, *panchayats* were elected from the community of regular worshippers. Many irregularities arose from the absence of a controlled system of temple management. In Singapore, the Government sought to bring about some order. It vested the management of the four main temples—Mariamman Temple, Sivan Temple, Perumal Temple, and Kaliamman Temple—in the Mohammedan and Hindu Endowment Board, a semi-government body. The Board appointed *panchayats* to take charge of running the daily activities of the temple. All financial expenditure was under the Board,

whose approval the *panchayats* had to seek for any activity involving finance. *Panchayats* managed the regular performance of temple ceremonial, and supervised duties of the temple staff. The management of Singapore's major Hindu temples by the body of Europeans who constituted the Board roused some hostile feelings among Hindus there. A writer in *The Indian* in August 1925 gave expression to these feelings and asked for a greater say by Hindus in the management of their temples.[1] Besides the Endowment Board, there was a Hindu Advisory Board that was presumably consulted on matters affecting Hindus in the Straits Settlements. It consisted of nominated Hindus but does not appear to have had much power.

In the Federated States even this amount of regularity was absent. Temples were managed by cliques of persons with no responsibility or accountability. An interesting document of 1924 reveals some information about the position as it then existed. It relates to the Mariamman Temple at Kuala Lumpur which was then, and still is, among the most prestigious and affluent temples in Malaya. It is entitled, *A full report of the proceedings of a meeting held on* 6.1.1924 *at the Mariamman Temple, High Street, Kuala Lumpur, to concert measures for the good government of the temple and its funds*. The temple appears to have been founded by a family of wealthy and influential persons in Kuala Lumpur, and was controlled in its early stages by their descendants. After some time its control appears to have been vested in the community of worshippers, collectively called *urar*, in the terminology of South India. A *panchayat* elected by the *urar* managed the temple's affairs, but in fact the descendants of the founders had considerable influence in management and finance. The meeting referred to in the document above reflects a difference between two factions: one representing those who were in effective control over the temple's affairs, and the other those who sought to challenge their power through appeals to the *urar*. It was a very noisy and contentious meeting, hard words were exchanged

[1] 'Matters Hindu by R.B.K., Management of Hindu Temples, I', *The Indian* (Vol. I, no. 5, August 1925).

between factions and no conclusive agreement was reached. It shows the handicaps suffered by the Hindu community in running strong and sound Hindu institutions in the absence of firm foundations in organization or a legal framework. Soon after this clash, there was some talk of legislation to regularize temple management but with no effect. The affairs of this temple were the subject of protracted litigation in the 1930s.

In the 1920s Hindu Sabhas and Sangams cropped up all over the country. Like the Indian Association of this period, they suffered from factionalism and the dispersal of energies through a multiplicity of societies. There was as yet no large united organization which the Government could recognize as representing Malayan Hindus and shift some of the responsibility for financial management. These bodies were unable to agree on nominations to the Advisory Board, and the Government was understandably cautious in handing over control of substantial funds to them. The increasing emphasis on Indian unity and identity after 1935 produced some effects on Hindu organizations also. There was a tendency towards fusion into more viable and stronger bodies.

Political and social developments within the Indian community after the war resulted in significant extensions of religious activity. The revival and revivification of Hinduism in India after independence also had its effects. Hindu Sabhas which has been dormant or had been adversely affected by the war, now sprang into activity. More intensive cultural and religious contact with India resulted in a steady stream of visitors pouring in at the invitation of Malayan societies. These were the religious and social leaders of the Indian renaissance, who were enthusiastically received and taken round the country, delivering speeches to vast audiences. One significant characteristic that emerges in the 1950s is the distinct commitment of the educated classes to their Hindu tradition. The observation has often been made above that before the war domiciled Indians tended to ignore their religious and cultural heritage and become consciously de-Indianized. Today, the professional

and upper class Indians, though in a large measure ignorant of their vernacular language and even the tenets of their traditional faith, develop a serious interest in these aspects of Indian tradition and take steps to equip themselves with knowledge of them. This is perhaps related to a general movement of rejection of cultural westernization, and the emphasis on individual Asian traditions taking place in South and South-east Asia. Study groups and lectures are organized in cities such as Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, where, through the medium of English, people re-educate themselves in their tradition. Among those knowledgeable in Tamil, the religious movement is carried on through the Tamil language. They now contribute more lavishly towards religious institutions. The general prosperity of all classes of Indians after the war and this renewed interest made possible the strengthening of existing religious establishments, and the opening of new ones.

This enthusiasm bore fruit in the 1950s with the formation of strong and well-organized movements looking after both regular temple worship as well as activities outside the temple. Every town with even a sprinkling of Indians built a temple, and on estates larger and more attractive structures were built. In Singapore, the Hindu Advisory Board was reconstituted by the colonial Government in 1949 with more representative nominees from all groups of Hindus. Thereafter this Board was responsible for all matters connected with Hindu worship and practice in the colony. In the Federation, Hindu Youth Organizations sprang up all over with an active programme of work. In 1954 an all Malaya Hindu Conference was called and, after some initial difficulty, a Hindu Council of Malaya was inaugurated. This body is composed of representatives from all Hindu organizations in the country. It came to be looked upon as responsible for all matters connected with the practice of Hinduism in the Federation.

The Malayan Hindu revival of post-war years was closely allied to the revival of Tamil culture. One assisted and fostered the other. There was greater use of Tamil in temple ritual. Tamil devotional literature specially suited to temple

worship was studied, and used widely in the temples. English-educated Tamils now began to take an interest in instructing their children in Tamil Hindu literature. Such classes were started all over by Hindu Sangams and temple authorities. Private study groups proliferated in the homes of wealthy patrons. An interest was shown in the study of the philosophical basis of Hinduism. The Saiva Siddhanta school of southern Hinduism was most popular because of its connexions with Tamil. Exponents of Saiva Siddhanta were invited from Madras to hold classes and deliver lectures. Soon there were Malayan exponents of this philosophy. In so far as Malayan Hinduism has a philosophic base, it may be said to be Saiva Siddhanta.

As a combined result of all these factors, Hinduism is entrenched as one of the living religions of Malaya in contemporary times. Some, though not all, of the variety of Indian Hinduism is reflected here. The vast majority of the people being Tamils, Malayalees, and Thelugus, it is the customs and practices of Dravidian India that predominate. The main emphasis is towards Saivism, and the worship of the female deity in its various forms is popular. Some Vaishnavites are to be found among Thelugus and, more prominently, among North Indian groups. It is an interesting reflection of Hindu diversity that these groups have established separate temples for their own worship. Integrated worship is carried on in some of the larger temples, but these separate shrines continue to cater for individual groups. It is possible for these groups to follow their parochial forms of worship, use their own vernacular, and in every way satisfy their separate identity. In a similar way, the estate community has its own forms, which it has brought over from the South Indian village. The educated classes self-consciously stand aloof from this type of worship, favouring a religion more Sanskritized and scriptural. Both groups meet in the large urban temples dedicated to universal deities. In these places the unity of the Hindu congregation is brought about, and contributes to emphasizing emotionally the Indian identity and separateness. A large number of the *agamic* temples of Malaya are dedicated to Murugan or

Subramanya and to Mariamman. These may be taken as the two most popular Hindu deities in this country, as they are in Tamil Nad. Murugan is the caste deity of the Chettyar, and this is an added reason for the popularity of this god in Malaya. All Chettyar temples are Subramanya temples.

From the early years, taboos connected with religious ritual were followed closely. Persons belonging to the 'untouchable' castes were not admitted into temples, in keeping with time-honoured practice in India. Some reform was brought about in 1935 when the Mahamariamman temple of Penang, an important *agamic* temple, opened its doors to these people. After the war all temples admitted 'untouchables', largely under the influence of the temple entry movements in India. But there was no resistance to this movement in Malaya as in India because of the absence of an entrenched orthodox Brahmin priesthood.

There are today about 200 Hindu temples in Malaysia and Singapore serving the Hindu congregation of these two countries. These temples are places of daily *pooja* and worship, as well as centres for the celebration of many festivals of the Hindu calendar. Because of obvious organizational difficulties, we find particular temples specializing in the celebration of particular festivals. In this way all Hindu festivals are celebrated in one or the other temple. Understandably, the celebrations are on a lesser key and might not conform to all the elaborateness of prescribed ritual. A description of some of the important festivals celebrated by the Hindus of Malaya may give some idea of the living character of Hindu religious practice.

Easily the most popular festival is *Thai Poosam*, occurring on the day in the Tamil month of *Thai* (January–February) when the asterism *Poosam* is on the ascendant. A popular festival in Tamil Nad, its celebration is recorded by immigrant labourers from the earliest dates. It is now celebrated in grand style in the temples of Singapore, Penang, and Kuala Lumpur for three days. In Singapore, *Thai Poosam* day has been a public holiday for some time. In Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur has become almost a national seat for *Poosam* celebrations. The venue of the Kuala Lumpur celebrations

is a picturesque shrine situated right inside a cave that lies many feet above the ground, and can only be approached by a steep climb. This place, known as Batu Caves, is about eight miles from the city, and a chariot procession carrying the image of the deity to and from the place adds to the colour and gaiety of the festival. Crowds from all over the country throng to the cave, including people of all classes and groups, and an intense religious feeling and emotion is exhibited, comparable to that on any similar occasion in South India. It is above all a day of penance, on which all kinds of vows are fulfilled. Thus one can see various forms of self-mortification that are common in India, and be surprised at the persistence of religious tradition. So marked has been the impact of this three-day festival, held in full view of the inhabitants of the capital city, that now it draws substantial crowds, and even some participation, from non-Indians. Some Chinese, who are able to fit into the thought-world of Indian religious beliefs through Mahayana Buddhism, share in the observance of some of the forms of worship on this day.

Deepavali is another very popular Indian festival. It has the advantage of being an all-Indian festival, and hence truly national to Indians in Malaya. In keeping with this, both in Malaysia and Singapore this day has been a public holiday for a long time. It is essentially a domestic festival, and the centre of activity is the Indian home. In the cities, middle- and upper-class Indians use the opportunity to entertain their non-Indian friends. It must be admitted that the religious character of the festival has now been lost sight of and it has been, in a sense, secularized in this multi-racial society. In the estates, too, *Deepavali* has been an occasion for merry-making and fun from very early times, in fact one of the few such occasions. The management sometimes subsidized these festivities out of the profits of toddy shops. Goats that had been reared for the occasion were slaughtered, and the meat distributed among neighbouring families. A lot of toddy was drunk on this day, and after the feasting there would generally be a variety of light entertainment. It was one of the rare occasions for

pleasant and friendly contact between labourers and their superiors—the Asian staff and even the European planters. Labourers took them presents, such as choice cuts of meat from the slaughtered goat, and vegetables and fruits from their gardens. In return they received cash presents. In the towns, cultural associations organized entertainment in the evening, and cinemas put on special Tamil films.

Thai Ponggal is a festival more popular in the estates than in the towns. It is a festival of the Tamils occurring on the first day of the month of *Thai*. In India it was celebrated as a harvest festival when the first grains were gathered and brought in for the ceremony. The Tamil labourers on the plantations continued to celebrate it, though its harvest significance was no longer of relevance. Some connexion with tradition was continued through the ritual of cow worship carried on in the *mattu* (cow) *ponggal* associated with this festival in India. Many labourers reared their own cattle, and so the ritual of *mattu ponggal* was followed. With the Tamil cultural revival of the post-war period, many Tamils in Malaya took to celebrating *Thai Ponggal* because it was a purely Tamil festival. Urban Indians showed interest, and organized festivities of a cultural nature.

Innumerable other Hindu festivals are celebrated, some as temple festivals, others as domestic ones. Particular temples have achieved a reputation as venues for the special celebration of particular festivals. Some of these festivals and the places specializing in them are: *Chittirai Paruvam* (Thandayuthapani Temple, Telok Anson), *Vinayaka Chathurthi* (Selva Vinayakar Kovil, Seremban), *Navaraththiri* (Singapore and Kuala Lumpur), *Karthikai Theepam* (Thandayuthapani Temple, Muar), *Panguni Uttiram* (Thandayuthapani Temple, Kuala Lumpur, as well as other temples in towns and estates), *Mariamman Thiruvila* (all estate temples), *Masi Maham* (Sannasimalai Andavar Kovil, Malacca), and the Hindu New Year. *Navaraththiri* and the Hindu New Year are also celebrated as domestic festivals. All these are occasions for religious worship as well as merry-making and entertainment when Hindus in a locality congregate and achieve a group identity. For many, these are the only

visible symbols of attachment to Indian tradition, and they cling to them tenaciously.

In most of these festivals, popular forms of devotion and display of religious emotion as practised in South India have persisted in some ways. Among the most significant of these is the carrying of the *kavadi*, a large wooden decorated arch, as an act of penance. When deities were taken on procession from one shrine to another, they would be followed by a number of these voluntary *kavadi*-bearers, doing it in fulfillment of a vow or in recompense of a successful prayer. In both Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, festivals such as *Thai Poosam* and *Chittirai Paruvam* attracted a number of *kavadi*-bearers. In other towns and in estates too, *kavadis* would be taken for other festivals. As in India, some of the more rigid practitioners made the exercise as painful as possible with many spikes, spears, and hooks pierced into the man's flesh. The large temples would receive innumerable applications from the public for permission to perform this act on festive occasions.

The practice of ritual slaughter of buffaloes, goats, and cockerel has been long ingrained in South Indian popular Hinduism, and immigrant labourers brought it along with them. In many estate temples, deities were offered blood sacrifice. Blood sacrifice could not be offered to the major deities of the pantheon which were Brahmanical, and therefore could not be polluted with such offering. They were offered to the village deities, wayside shrines, and other non-Brahmanical gods and goddesses. This dichotomy, which exists even today between Brahmanical and non-Brahmanical Hindu worship, was reproduced in Malaya. Animal slaughter was a normal form of worship in the festivals in estate temples, as well as in the temples catering for labourers in urban areas. The slaughter was followed by a feast in which the flesh was cooked and distributed to participants.

Then there was the practice of fire-walking, also as an act of penance on certain festivals. The *Chittirai Paruvam* festival and festivals to Mariamman were usually accompanied by a fire-walking ceremony. Estate temples and some urban temples would have regular fire-walking ceremonies. A large

fire was built in a pit in the precincts of the temple. When the fire-wood had burnt into red hot embers, devotees walked through it on bare feet in an attitude of penance and worship. Like *kavadi*-bearing, it was considered a prestigious act in the Indian community. The novelty and the bravado of the act attracted large groups of non-Indian spectators. In Singapore, where one big temple held an annual fire-walking ceremony, colonial Governors used to visit the temple to watch the ceremony. In the estates, the European planter was the 'chief guest'.

The movement to reform some of these practices and bring popular Hinduism in line with scriptural Hinduism has existed in India since the nineteenth century. Gradually, both by legislation and voluntary act, Hinduism has been cleansed of these archaic folk customs. The impact of these reforms on Malayan Hinduism was rather delayed, because of the lack of leadership by the educated classes which, before the war were unconcerned with, and ignorant of, developments in India. Some limited attempt at reform was made, however, with the formation of the Tamil Reform Association in 1931, a body devoted to the reform of abuses in Tamil society and religion with a view to modernizing them. These reformers felt that reform was necessary not only to keep pace with the modernization movement in Hinduism in India, but also to bring Malayan Hindus onto a level with other communities in Malaya, not looked down on by them as backward and archaic. Branches of the Association were formed in many parts of Malaya, but the Singapore body remained the most active innovator of change, and a persistent pressure group for reform. From 1936 it published a monthly journal, *Reform*, devoted (as its blurb said) to social reforms. In the very first issue, its editorial declared 'a crusade against all superstitions that disgrace Tamil society'.[2] The Association also published a tri-weekly in Tamil, *Munnetram*, where it carried on lusty propaganda for reformist causes. The earliest activities of this body after its formation were to promote the temple entry movement, and the removal of disabilities against depressed castes.

[2] *Reform* (Vol. 1, no. 1, Singapore, July 1936).

Reform of popular religion had the highest priority in the activities of the Association and those allied to it. Malayan reformers thought that the public performance of some of these practices was degrading, and contributed to lowering the esteem of the Indian in Malaya. A characteristic of reform movements among Indians in Malaya has been their constant concern with the image of the Indian in the eyes of other Malayan ethnic groups. How could Indian society and custom be improved to better this image? Besides the intrinsic merit of the reforms and the arguments for them on the Indian side, this was an additional factor. The progress of the reform movements of Madras was closely watched, their propaganda was reproduced in publications, and their success held up as an example. In 1938 and 1939, the Association turned its attention to *kavadi*-bearing, and attempted to persuade the Government and leaders of the Indian community in favour of legislation to ban or control the practice of various kinds of self-immolation in public.

After the war, increasing knowledge of Hinduism and greater interest in it among the educated classes made them more receptive to socio-religious reform. They were more prepared now to come forward as leaders of opinion in these matters, and use their growing influence in the community towards these ends. Opinion was very much agreed on the need to abolish sacrificial slaughter as part of Hindu worship. The movement in Madras had been very successful in this, and soon after the war legislation towards this end was passed. In Malaya, by the education of public opinion and by pressure brought to bear on many temples, blood sacrifice was gradually given up voluntarily. It is now a rare occurrence, taking place only on wayside shrines and as an isolated act.

The two conspicuous practices of *kavadi*-bearing and fire-walking were difficult to reform. They had penetrated deep into Malayan Indian popular religion. The Tamil Reform Association resumed its offensive from where it had left off before the war. It again proposed legislation banning these practices. But the body of Hindu opinion both in Singapore

and in the Federation was against legislation by a state that had no connexion with Hinduism. The position they took was similar to that of conservative Hindus in India, that a secular state should not be permitted to interfere in matters of religious worship and doctrine. A number of Hindu organizations in Malaya, though they agreed on the necessity to cleanse Hindu worship of these practices gradually, could not support legislation towards this end. It is significant that one of these associations, the Singapore Hindu Association, wrote to leading Hindu authorities in India asking for some guidance on this question. It was reported that they received a reply in June 1949 from a leading Hindu, holding a high position in the Government of India, advising them not to agitate for legislation to reform Hindu religious and social practices on the grounds that this might eventually lead to the disappearance of piety and religion.[3] This strengthened the hand of conservative elements in Malayan Hindu society. The reformers then sought to persuade temple authorities to take voluntary action. They succeeded in persuading a few important temples to ban *kavadi*-bearing in their festivals in 1950. But the temples were flooded with requests for permission from prospective *kavadi*-bearers. Fearing the loss of their patronage, the temples rescinded their earlier decision. Hindu practitioners were obviously not prepared for reform. The practice of self-immolation continues in both Singapore and Malaysia. The State will not intervene in the absence of agreement among Hindus. Fire-walking is declining in incidence, but is by no means eradicated. It is thus of interest that Malayan Hindu practices show considerably more conservatism in some aspects than those in South India, where the impact of the religious reform movement was more heavily felt among all classes. No serious attempts at religious reform were made in Malaya after the 1950s.

The Hindu reformist monastic order, the Ramakrishna Mission, established itself in Malaya with most fruitful results. In 1915, the Mission founded a centre in Singapore, and soon extended into Kuala Lumpur. It was followed by the Vivekananda Society, an allied mission with similar aims.

[3] *Straits Times*, 10 June 1949.

The work of these missions had impact on the religious and the social planes. Through them, a band of devoted and intellectually equipped monks came and served in this country. They functioned as the intellectual leaders of Malayan Hinduism, and reminded Hindus of their cultural heritage at a time when the Indian middle class lacked such leaders and had little interest in these matters. Soon the middle class supported their activities. The *Swamis* of the mission lectured on and taught the basic ideas of Hinduism. Theirs was a non-sectarian order, and by their approach they were able to rise above the sectarian differences among Hindus and leave their mark on all culture groups. Their general interest in, and knowledge of, world religions, made them extend their influence beyond Indian groups to the intelligentsia of other races. Their universalism and tolerance helped them provide a platform for the meeting of all religions of Malaya. Through them, Malayan Hindus have established intellectual contact with leaders of other religious groups. Their welfare activities have left an even greater impact on all classes of Indians. They ran some excellent schools, both in Singapore and in the Federation, schools which were the only ones in the country providing education with an Indian cultural bias. They ran orphanages and children's homes, *ashrams* and meditation centres. All in all they have been among the most civilizing influences in the country.

Besides Hinduism, another Indian religion practised in Malaya is Sikhism. It is prevalent among the large number of Punjabis who are Sikhs. Sikh temples are to be found in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur as well as in a few other towns with a measurable Sikh population. In these temples Sikh worship is carried on with the help of *Gurus* who are generally brought over from the Punjab. The Sikh Missionary Society periodically sends lecturers and teachers to Malaya. The main Sikh festivals, such as the birth and death anniversary of Guru Nanak and of Guru Govind Singh, *Vaisakhi*, and the Sikh New Year, are celebrated in the temples. Sikhs have shown strong adherence to traditional customs, such as growing their hair long and wearing the turban.

They celebrate *Deepavali* as a secular festival. In the temples there are schools where Punjabi in the *Gurmukhi* script is taught. This is essential for the maintenance of the religious tradition, as the Sikh *Granth* or Bible has to be read in this script. As in the case of the Hindus, Sikh elders complain of a growing alienation of the youth from traditional practices and piety.

It is significant that even among Indians who belong to faiths which are multi-national in character, such as Christianity and Islam, separate Indian institutions are established within the faith. Muslims have done this from the earliest days of their entry into Malaya. Thus Malacca had a Kampong Palli under the Portuguese and the Dutch, the suburb where the Indian mosque was situated. Now Indian mosques (i.e. places built and run by Indian Muslims for the worship of their community) are to be found in all large cities. There are also associations of Indian Muslims in various parts of the country with welfare functions. Among Indian Muslims who have been settled for several generations there is a distinct tendency to merge with Malay Muslims, a trend hastened by the natural desire to partake in Malay privileges. But more recent migrants self-consciously maintain their identity through these separate religious institutions. Language is a factor that helps in this separatism from Malay Muslims; the North Indian Muslims would like to continue to use Urdu for intercourse among themselves and the South Indians, Tamil and Malayalam. Politically they identify with the Indians and work through the Malayan Indian Congress.

Similar factors have operated in the case of the Christians. Though a tiny minority among Indians, their influence has been great because of their relative affluence and education. The large missions of the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, the Methodist Church, and the Baptist Church have established Tamil churches in areas where there are large Tamil congregations. Such linguistic separation is convenient in using the vernacular language in church ceremony as well as other dealings. Sometimes social clubs and welfare organizations are also so organized. Churches

such as the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar and the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church have their metropolis in India, and are controlled from there. The former has its headquarters in Travancore and manages in Malaya a well-knit and highly educated community of Syrian Christians of Malabar. The Lutheran Church is under the Bishop of Tranquebar, and receives its pastors from there.

By and large, the Indians in Malaya are a religious-minded community. Professing many different faiths, each adheres closely to his faith and helps to support and maintain it. Hindu and Sikh religions, being the product of Indian culture, help to maintain Indian traditions in this country. Even those Indians who belong to multi-national religions attempt to Indianize their faith in some way, so that they may not be totally alienated from their compatriots.

VII | Indian Education and its Social Effects

Indian children in Malaya received their education either in one of the English-medium schools or in Indian schools teaching in one of the following languages: Tamil, Malayalam, Thelugu, Punjabi, or Hindi. The first regular Indian language school was the Tamil school attached to the Penang Free School founded in 1816. It does not appear to have lasted long. The Singapore Free School started Tamil classes in 1834 but soon abandoned them. Around 1850 there is reference to an Anglo-Tamil school in Malacca which also had a short life. Similar Anglo-Tamil Schools are also referred to in Singapore and Penang. In 1859 the Singapore St. Francis Xavier Malabar School started classes in Tamil. Probably these were all attempts by missionaries to serve the old settled Tamil population in these three settlements.

After the 1870s, Tamil schools sprang up in these places as well as in other areas such as Province Wellesley and Johore where Tamils were employed. The first efforts to open these schools were made by missionary bodies such as the Ladies' Bible and Tracts Society, the Society for the Propagation of Christianity, and the big Church Missions. Later the Government stepped in, and put up the first Government Tamil schools in Perak and Negri Sembilan in 1900. In some coffee and rubber plantations, the management opened schools with a view to attracting labourers to settle or stay longer. Thus there were some Tamil schools in the country by 1920, founded and managed by a wide array of authorities. There was no proper policy or control, as is seen by the appearance and disappearance of schools. The Government clearly did not want to take on the responsibility of providing education for immigrant communities, and

expected missionary effort and plantation managers to fulfil the need. But no attempt was made to make this obligatory on planters and so the provision of education facilities on estates varied widely. In most plantations there were more nurseries and crèches to look after children while the parents were at work than schools.

It was only in 1923 that some attempt at a policy was made. In the labour code of 1923, at the request of the Government of India, provision was made for the education of labourers' children. The code stipulated that a school be erected on each estate with ten or more resident children of school-going age. The school-going age was defined as from 6 to 12 years. It was one thing to legislate for educational facilities; it was another to see that these were conscientiously provided. From the outset, it was obvious that the planters had accepted this obligation only to ease the flow of Indian labour. This is clear from the attitude taken by the planters' representative in the Federal Council when the code was debated. He said: 'So long as they let the Controller of Labour pass my smoke factory with the word "school" written up in large letters I shall be quite happy.'[1] Planters were never reconciled to the view of the Government that it was their responsibility to provide education for their labourers' children while the Government was discharging its obligations to the rest of the community. Thus the planters became the reluctant custodians of the education of the vast majority of Indian children. Many of the ills of the estate educational system flowed from this shift of responsibility.

The Controller of Labour was responsible for seeing that estates set up such schools for their children, but he was not concerned with what happened in these schools. So the estate educational system grew with a nominal acquiescence in the provisions of the code. Very few estates would undergo the expenditure of employing teachers. Clerks, *kanganys*, and even literate labourers would function as part-time teachers. The school was often a dilapidated shed, set apart to concur nominally with the provisions of the code, and to

[1] F.M.S., *Proceedings of the Federal Council*, 1923, B107–8.

keep the children out of trouble. In the 1920s, employment was available even for children after the age of 10, when their parents would send them off to work. The parents saw no benefit in educating their children. From the age of 10 the child would be a labourer and he would not be any the better for having acquired an education. However, from the passing of the regulation, the number of Tamil schools in the F.M.S. and the Straits Settlements showed an increase. In 1925 there were 235 Tamil schools in the F.M.S. with an average enrolment of 8,153 pupils. By 1930 these had increased to 333 schools with an average enrolment of 12,640 pupils. The Depression saw a setback to Tamil education. A number of estate schools were closed, but with economic recovery many of them were reopened.

The major problem connected with Tamil education in Malaya has been, and still is, its quality and content. In many other Asian countries, education under colonial powers has been a powerful influence towards levelling social inequalities by opening a path to social progress for children of the under-privileged classes. Through the acquisition of English education, children of Indian middle- and upper-class parents were able to better their lot and enter the elite groups in Malayan society. From the outset this opening was denied to the children of labourers, for both by the quality and the content of the education they received they were isolated from the rest of society and ill-equipped to play any role in the country's development. The most serious problem was the quality of teachers. In many estates, clerks, conductors, dispensers, *kanganys*, or even labourers would be detailed to take charge of the school for a few hours of the day. In those few estates that had provision for a teacher, the pay was so meagre that none but the least fitted for pedagogy offered themselves. In the rare instances that there was a trained teacher, he was a recent immigrant from India who accepted this job as a stepping-stone to employment in better-paid schools in urban areas. Even such a full-time teacher could not do a good job of work, because he had simultaneously to look after four grades of pupils in varying age groups, sitting together in one small

shack. It is true that after the Depression, with growing unemployment among the educated, recruitment of trained teachers to estate schools was somewhat improved. At this time many estates gave up the part-time teacher and recruited full-time teachers. Even so, in 1937 out of 800 Tamil teachers in the F.M.S. and S.S., less than a quarter held training certificates. There was no provision for the training of Tamil teachers in Malaya until 1937. For all these years the whole system of Tamil education in the country was nothing but a sham and a mockery.

Some limited attempts were made by the Government to improve the position in Tamil schools in this period, though they did not go far enough. The Government pressed managers to appoint full-time teachers to replace the part-time arrangements that were then functioning. In 1926 it attempted to get a European officer with a knowledge of Tamil to report on these schools, but with no visible effect. Again in 1929 it drafted regulations for the organization and administration of all Tamil schools, printed these regulations, and distributed them to all estate managers for compliance. A Grants-in-Aid Committee that sat in 1932 recommended the payment of grants to vernacular schools at the rate of 6 dollars per pupil per year. This grant was to be based on examinations and average attendance. From 1935 this grant was increased to 8 dollars. The provision to use revenues from estate toddy shops also made available some funds for Tamil schools. In some estates, out of this money children were given free uniforms and text books, and sometimes even parents were given a gift of rice if the child's attendance was satisfactory.

Absence of provision for specialist inspection of Tamil schools also made them grow as Cinderellas of the education system. In 1930 for the first time an officer with a knowledge of Tamil was appointed to the Malayan Educational Service to inspect Tamil schools and supervise their work. This officer died shortly after his appointment, and the office was not filled for some years. In 1937 the post was revived, and a substantive Inspector of Indian Schools was appointed to the Department of Education. The officer first studied Tamil

at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. Then he was sent to India to acquaint himself with colloquial Tamil and to study the Tamil primary education system in the Madras state. This proved an effective step in improving the Tamil schools of Malaya. At about the same time, the Government initiated a scheme for training Tamil teachers. Classes for such training were opened in many training centres of Malaya. It was found that the response was good. The results of these measures were soon felt in at least some schools where an enlightened management co-operated with the education authorities. The curriculum in these schools was reformed, and a more meaningful training was given to the children. With the emphasis on land settlement and agricultural side-occupations for the labourers, an agricultural bias was given to the teaching.

In cities and townships, educational facilities were of varied character. The Government itself was rather backward in facing up to its responsibilities for the children of large groups of labourers employed in its various services. Tamil schools in towns with Public Works and Railway labourers in large concentrations were most inadequate. In the Straits Settlements, there was not a single Government Tamil school before the war, and in the F.M.S. there were only thirteen. It was left to private effort to step in where Government had failed. There was some Christian missionary activity, though they preferred to concentrate their main energies on English education. Indian Associations and groups of Indian philanthropists ran some schools. In Penang, the Indian Association founded two schools. The Ramakrishna Mission opened schools in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. In Singapore, the Tamil Reform Association helped in founding a few schools.

It must be noted that all these Tamil schools were primary schools. All Tamil education stopped there, and there was no provision in the country to carry on further. The full course in these schools, on paper, lasted six years with one primary year and five standards. But very few schools had the fourth and fifth standards, most of them stopping with a four-year course at the end of Standard III. All the

teaching was in Tamil; no English or Malay was taught, leaving children unable to carry on any further in any of the other educational streams. The subjects taught were reading, writing, dictation, arithmetic, and, in the higher classes, composition and geography. Physical education and agriculture were introduced later. Very few pupils stayed on even for the basic four-year course. In 1937 there were only 650 pupils in the entire F.M.S. in standard IV, and less than 200 in Standard V.

In English medium schools no Tamil or other Indian language was taught, with the exception of a few Ramakrishna Mission Schools and one or two Christian schools. Thus, while the children of Indian labourers were taught no English, Indian middle-class children learned no Tamil. A number of Indian children born and bred in Malaya thus grew up ignorant of their mother tongue. Leaders of the community showed alarm at this. The children had to begin their education in English primary schools so that they might be sure of gaining entry into the English secondary schools. This was one of the issues raised by a group of representative Indians in their memorandum to Srinivasa Sastri. They asked that primary instruction at the lowest level should be in the child's mother tongue.[2] This principle was not conceded by the Government.

Even for children of the educated classes, there was more demand than places available in schools. They felt this acutely, as education was the sole means by which these groups had risen in society and by which they could continue to keep their status. The Indian member in the Federal Council referred to the availability of educational opportunities for Indians more than once. After the Depression, when Government spending on education was reduced, the pressure was even more acute. School fees were raised in 1934, and this affected Indian parents very much. They felt that there was discrimination in admissions to schools and higher institutions. Srinivasa Sastri took this up with the authorities, and was assured by the Department of Education that there was no discrimination in admission. Indian

[2] *Memorandum to Rt. Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri*, op. cit., p. 19.

enrolment in English schools was quite heavy, ranking next to the Chinese and ahead of the Malays. In 1938 there were 2,197 Indian boys and 994 girls out of a total of 17,568 boys and 8,201 girls in English schools in the S.S., and 3,478 boys and 1,750 girls out of a total of 12,364 boys and 5,781 girls in English schools in the F.M.S.[3] Indians made greater progress in education in the S.S., where the principle of open competition was operating in admissions. Some sent their children to India for post-secondary and university education. The educational system before the war, as far as the Indians were concerned, was in many ways unsatisfactory. It hardened existing divisions among them and contributed in no way towards their future orientation towards Malayan society.

Indian education, like the education of all communities, suffered under Japanese occupation. All schools were converted into Japanese schools, and anyone with a smattering of Japanese was appointed an instructor. When British power was re-established the education system had to be remoulded. The Colonial Government after the war took a more positive attitude towards social welfare. Education received high priority in its development policies, and Indian education soon felt the impact of the new reforms. In 1946 a new education policy was announced. There was to be free primary education in the Malayan Union through the mother tongue. Provision was to be made for such education in Malay, Chinese, Tamil, and English. English was to be taught in all schools. With the dissolution of the Malayan Union and its replacement by the Federation of Malaya, this policy was not implemented. Together with the ferment over constitutional and communal questions, the whole concept of Malaya's new educational policy was in the melting pot. A Committee was appointed in 1949 to 'advise Government on the general common policy and wide principles to be followed in education'. This was the beginning of a series of such investigations on Malayan education policy.

In the meantime, the Indian community partook in the

[3] S.S. and F.M.S., *Annual Report on Education*, 1938.

explosive expansion of education in Malaya at all levels. In 1946 the total enrolment in Tamil schools in the Malayan Union had risen to 29,800 pupils, and in 1949 this figure stood at 38,700. There were four types of Indian schools: Government schools, estate schools, mission schools, and committee schools. There were twenty-six Government schools in all, primarily in urban areas, to cater for Government labourers' children. Estate schools were still the most numerous, accounting for three-fifths of the total enrolment in Tamil schools. Each school had a strength of about forty to seventy pupils and generally had one or two teachers. Mission schools were managed by diverse Christian Missions and the Ramakrishna Mission. Committee schools were those run by committees of local residents on private subscriptions. The level of drop-out in these schools was still very high, only 25 per cent of pupils staying on more than two years in school. Government aid was now more extensive than before the war. It covered furniture, equipment, books and stationery, and cash grants to pay salaries of teachers at standard rates.

Some improvement had been effected in the organization of courses in these schools. The child was admitted at 6 years and passed out at 11+. The course was divided into six Standards, with a Standard VII in some schools where there was a demand. About 75 per cent of the enrolment in Tamil schools was in Standards I and II. A few causes explain this big drop-out. On the one side there was the persistence of the old economic and social factors. Parents found it profitable to send their children to work rather than to school. Girls were required to look after babies at home while parents went to work. Labourer parents thought the whole education process futile when after six years spent in school the child was in no way economically better off than his father. There was another cause of early dropping out from Tamil schools. Many educated parents sent their children for the first two or three years to a Tamil school to pick up their mother tongue and then transferred them to the English school. Tamil education still continued to be a dead end, not leading the child along any fruitful path, nor opening any useful opportunity.

Indian participation in English education increased phenomenally after the war. Any Indian parent who could afford it sought to give his child an English education. The Annual Report on Education of 1949 says: 'Indian community as a whole has made relatively a greater use of the facilities for English education than any of the domiciled races whose mother tongue is not English.'[4] This feature remains today. The total enrolment of Indian children in English and Tamil schools gives them the highest ratio of school-going children among all races in Malaysia. Another feature of post-war years was the increase in female education among Indians. For some years Indians had the highest enrolment ratio of girls to boys among all communities except Eurasians. Among all Indian groups other than labourers, the value of education in ensuring and enhancing their status had been realized.

The increasing enrolment in Tamil schools underlined the problem of teacher shortage as well as of inadequate teacher training. Those who had followed the full course up to Standard VII in a Tamil school were recruited as teachers. Because of the demand for teachers, the Department of Education reduced the minimum standard for teachers to Standard VI. Teacher training schemes were expanded. In 1949, out of 1,341 Tamil schoolteachers, 369 were trained and 617 were undergoing training. Training classes were held on Saturdays and Sundays, and instruction was given by Assistant Inspectors or trained schoolteachers from English schools. The course lasted three years, and at the end of it candidates were examined by the Department and given certificates of training. These were confirmed after two years of satisfactory teaching. In 1947 an incremental salary scale was introduced for Tamil teachers. Altogether, teachers were now showing far greater interest in their work, engaging in extra-curricular activities in the school community, and were a more articulate force in estate society. Teachers' Associations had been formed which were undertaking adult and further education classes. Tamil teachers

[4] Federation of Malaya, *Annual Report on Education*, 1949, p. 65.

were emerging as an important opinion-forming group among numerous Indians not literate in English.

The content of education in these schools was also improved. The Department gave specialist advice on curricula and teaching methods. There was now more emphasis on practical crafts such as handwork and sewing. Physical education was developed. Textbooks printed in India were used mostly but some attempt was made to write books with a Malayan orientation. The school building itself was improved. The Department prescribed certain minimum standards and supplied a simple plan for building. Estate schools had to conform to this standard to qualify for aid.

The Committee appointed in 1949 reported in 1951.[5] This Report, widely known as the Barnes Report on Malay Education, made important recommendations that affected Indian education. It advocated a national education policy that would be geared to the ideal of a unified national culture. To achieve this, it decried the existence of parallel school systems and many media of instruction. It also sought to prepare the country educationally for the long-term replacement of English by Malay as the language of administration. National schools were to be set up for children of all races teaching in Malay and English. All schools were to be encouraged to teach Malay and English. The Report encouraged Chinese and Indian schools to consider their educational systems in the long-term. Because of Chinese pressure, the Government appointed a Committee to consider Chinese education and the Fenn-Wu Report was produced in 1951. The Indians, bitter at the denial of their request for a Government Committee on Indian education, formed their own unofficial committee, the Indian Education Committee.[6]

The Indian Committee felt very strongly that the child's education should begin in his mother tongue. It criticized the Barnes Committee Report for denying this principle to the Indian and the Chinese child. It recommended that

[5] Federation of Malaya, *Report of the Committee on Malay Education*, 1951.

[6] M.I.C., *Memorandum on Indian Education in the Federation of Malaya by the Indian Education Committee, under the auspices of the M.I.C.*, 31 August 1951.

the first three years of education should be fully in the mother tongue. Spoken Malay could be introduced in the third year. In the fourth year, all children in the school from the different language media would come together to learn English. In the fifth year, Romanized Malay was to be introduced. Up to the fifth year the medium of instruction for all subjects was to be the child's mother tongue. In the sixth year the medium would change to English, and classes would be mixed. Mother tongue would continue to be learnt as a subject together with Malay. The Committee thus favoured trilingualism, and in this it agreed with the recommendations of the Fenn-Wu Report. It ended with a declaration accepting Malay as the national language of Malaya, but stipulated that the non-Malay child should not be interfered with in the study of his own language and culture.

The conflicting views presented by these Reports were put before a Special Committee of the Federal Legislative Council that was to make recommendations on future policy. The Committee accepted the National Schools as the pattern for education in Malaya. They would use English or Malay as the medium of instruction, the other language being taught as a second language. Chinese and Tamil could be taught as a third language provided that at least fifteen pupils in a school wanted to learn one of these languages. Thus, Chinese and Tamil were not accepted as part of the national system. The Chinese- and Tamil-medium schools were left alone, decisively out of the national system, but were permitted to continue because of the political hazards of abolishing them and the expenditure that would be involved in setting up a uniform system of schools that could cope with the demands of admission of every school-going child. In a statement on educational policy made in 1954, the Government very significantly declared that it would concentrate on those parts of the education programme that were absolutely essential to the progress and unity of the country. Economy in expenditure on education was achieved at the cost of schools held to be outside the national system, the Chinese

and Tamil schools. As part of this economy drive, it was agreed not to establish Standard VII classes in Indian schools, except as were necessary to produce recruits to teach in these schools. Such classes were to be formed only in centres where there were sufficient pupils to form classes of reasonable size.[7]

The policy enunciated in 1954 left the way open for the future integration of Indian and Chinese schools into the national system. This was to be brought about by the gradual introduction of English and Malay into these schools. But it was of course to depend on the availability of qualified teachers of English and Malay. This was the serious obstacle on which all these well-intentioned policies were to founder and make Tamil vernacular schools remain in the educational backwater.

With the devolution of more power to the Malayan people, a national Government took office in 1955 with control over education. It appointed a Committee under the Chairmanship of Dato Abdul Razak to review educational policy.[8] The Razak Report went some way towards accommodating the views of minority groups. It reiterated the aims of educational policy as the bringing together of all races under a national educational system. It made a genuine attempt to bring all existing schools into this national system. There were to be four types of primary schools. Standard primary schools were those where Malay was the medium of instruction with English as a subject. Standard-type primary schools were those where the medium of instruction was Chinese, Tamil, or English. Finally there were the Chinese and Tamil vernacular primary schools, where English and Malay were to be taught as second languages. In this manner the existing primary schools of the four language streams were brought under a uniform system with theoretically equal facilities, standards, and requirements. While all Government schools were to be converted to the new types, private and aided schools had

[7] Federation of Malaya, *Educational Policy: Statement of the Federal Government on the Report of the Special Committee*, 1954.

[8] Federation of Malaya, *Report of the Special Committee on Education*, 1956.

the choice of entering the system. Almost all of them chose to do so. Chinese and Tamil schools would progressively be converted to national-type schools, as they became staffed with teachers qualified to teach English and Malay in addition to the vernacular taught in the school. In all primary schools, if parents of at least fifteen children requested the teaching of Tamil or Chinese, provision was to be made for this.

Secondary schools were to be either English- or Malay-medium schools, with the option of teaching Chinese or Tamil as a subject if there were fifteen pupils wanting to learn the language. From 1965 it became possible for pupils from Chinese and Tamil schools to join an English-medium secondary school after staying a year in a remove class where they received intensive coaching in English. Bright pupils from Tamil schools in estates take advantage of this provision to secure secondary and higher education.

The extent to which Indian vernacular schools conformed to the national standard may be seen from the following figures. In 1956, out of 1,713 teachers in these schools, 1,001 were trained and 712 untrained. Out of over 900 such schools, only sixty-eight had teachers of English and forty-nine had teachers of Malay. Preference in the staffing of schools by qualified teachers was given to Malay and English schools. When the 1956 policy was subject to review by a Committee in 1960 under the Chairmanship of Abdul Rahman Talib, the Minister of Education, it was recognized that so far only Malay Primary Schools had been converted into standard schools.[9] The teacher training programme had not progressed fast enough to take in all streams. The Rahman Talib Report detailed ways in which Chinese and Tamil schools could be integrated into the national system. Malay was to be taught in these schools from Standard I, and English was to be introduced from the third school year. But again the Report added that the implementation of this must depend on the supply of teachers. Shortage of qualified teachers would not be surmounted even in twenty years.

The objectives, as far as the Tamil schools are concerned,

[9] Federation of Malaya, *Report of the Education Review Committee*, 1960.

are yet to be fully realized. There are today (1968) about 680 national-type Tamil primary schools in the country. But in many the standards are pretty low. Speedy training schemes have emphasized quantity rather than quality in the production of trained teachers. Many schools are still inadequately staffed. Teachers bear the burden of simultaneously attending to as many as five classes. Grouping of estate schools into large viable units met with many obstacles and was not pursued vigorously. Such group schools have been successfully established in some large estates where schools previously situated in the many divisions of an estate have been brought together. In urban areas too there are now sizeable Tamil schools. A few of these schools have become really large and well-run units with an enrolment of over 400 pupils, employing ten to fifteen teachers. Such mergers of small schools should be the trend for the future if Tamil primary schools are to provide an educational grounding for their pupils that would in some measure at least enable them to bridge the wide gulf that exists between these children and children in the other language streams.

Some private as well as state activity subvents the education of Indian labour children in some ways. The most important is the South Indian Labour Fund Board, constituted in 1958 out of the Indian Immigration Fund. The Board offers scholarships to children of labour origins at various levels from the primary school through secondary education to higher education in the University of Malaya, the Technical College, and the Agricultural College. The extent of the N.U.P.W.'s contribution was noted above. Other bodies help, such as the National Education Development Society and the National Land Finance Co-operative Society. Both these bodies have made available scholarships to Indian students. The Indian Government awards a few scholarships yearly for higher education in India. But it must be recognized that all these are a drop in the ocean relative to the needs of Indian education.

In Singapore the position of Indian education has been somewhat better, at least in the primary stage. Though the demand for Tamil education is not as great as on the

mainland, the Government has been able to make moderate provision for Tamil in the education system. From 1947, Tamil primary schools were incorporated into the national system. All primary education was in the child's mother tongue and from the four language streams, after a primary school-leaving exam, the child could opt to go into the English secondary school or continue in the mother tongue medium. The demand for secondary education in Tamil was very poor, and there is one such school which is able to take in all pupils who want to continue their education in the Tamil medium. Tamil could be taken as a subject in the English school, more satisfactory provision being made than in Malaysia by instituting centres where children from schools in an area could go to learn Tamil. Because of these factors, the standard of literacy in Tamil among the Indian middle class is higher in Singapore than in Malaysia.

It is a curious phenomenon of the Tamil educational pyramid in Malaya that it has a base and a top but no middle. Secondary education in Tamil, as seen above, is noteworthy by its absence. But it was decided to establish a Department of Indian Studies in the University of Malaya in 1956 with Tamil as its main language of study. It was a recognition of the fact that both Malaya and Singapore needed people with high academic qualifications in Tamil, albeit in small numbers, to man some services where Government comes into contact with the Tamil-speaking public. Yet it is a serious defect of the educational structure as far as the Indian is concerned that the established educational institutions in the country provide for his studying Tamil at the primary level and at university level with a wide gap in between. Those who come to study Tamil at university are students who have succeeded in retaining their limited proficiency in the language through private informal study. This must inevitably affect standards of teaching in the university, and hamper the further development of this Department as a place for Tamil literary learning of a high order.

In spite of these handicaps, an active Tamil literary culture has been implanted and continues to flourish. The

first Tamil newspapers were published in the 1920s and thereafter there has been considerable publishing activity in newspapers, periodicals, literary magazines, and some novels and religious expositions. Many of the newspapers, periodicals, and literary magazine were shortlived and financially unsuccessful. Two Tamil national dailies, *Thamil Nesan* in Malaysia and *Thamil Murasu* in Singapore, have succeeded in establishing themselves soundly for over thirty years. To these a third national daily has been added in recent years. Some periodicals and journals have appeared recently in different parts of the country. A Tamil literary magazine for Malaya of any standard is yet to be established. This is partly because magazines from South India come in at cheap rates and are widely read. The *Kalki* and *Ananda Vikadan*, two such magazines from Madras, are popular among the Malayan Tamil reading public. Before 1940 all the literary material published in Malayan Tamil newspapers was of Indian origin. All editors and their assistants had to be employed from Madras because of the absence of educational opportunities in Tamil beyond Standards VI and VII.

Since 1950 there has been a conscious attempt to develop a Malayan Tamil literature. Immigration rules made difficult the continued employment of Indian nationals, and newspapers began to take the lead in creating enthusiasm for Tamil writing. They ran Sunday literary magazines and competitions in various literary forms such as the short story, verse, serialized stories, and plays. Today all published literature, whether in newspapers, magazines, or anthologies is by Malayan writers. Tamil teachers have been in the forefront of this literary movement. Opportunities created by journalism, radio, and television brought out other hidden talent and stirred up latent interest. Tamil literary associations cropped up in many parts of the country. They ran literary competitions. Classical Tamil literature was studied in study groups organized by these associations. The *Thirukkural Manram*, an association for the study of the *Thirukkural*, a second century Tamil classic, is active in many parts of the country.

There are now estimated to be about 300 Tamil writers in Malaysia and Singapore, some of them achieving a standard comparable to that in Tamil Nad. The short story and the play are popular literary forms. The former can be easily published in newspapers and periodicals, the latter produced over radio and television, or in club entertainment. There is an active Tamil Writers' Association co-ordinating the activities of these writers. What is noteworthy is that for most of these people creative writing in Tamil is at best a hobby. None can make a living out of it. Without State support in any form, lacking the patronage of wealthy foundations or individuals, the very existence of Tamil literary culture in Malaya is an index to the deep roots of the Tamil tradition in Indian society.

Education is one of the significant factors that tends to divide the Indian community into two classes. A big gulf divides those who have secured English education from those who have not. These divisions are in a sense frozen, on account of the educational structure as it affects the Indians. The English-educated groups are a self-perpetuating oligarchy within the Indian community, in the absence of opportunities for others to break into this category. In theory, the child from the Tamil school can end up with a university education. But the actual possibility is very remote. About 80 per cent of Tamil schools are in estates. In spite of improvements many of them are still single-teacher, multiple-class schools. The drop-out rate after the first three years is excessive. Even if the parents are willing, financial difficulties stand in the way of their sending the child to the nearest English school outside the estate. The children who learn in English schools from the earliest stage of their educational career forget the little Tamil they might have picked up at home. They are unable to speak the language, let alone read and write it. The gulf between the two groups grows wider. Children of labourer groups cannot aspire to improve their status. There has been very little or no occupational mobility among these groups. All the mobility is restricted to a slight upward movement of one grade from a very low status occupation to one somewhat

less so. The steep social rise that was made possible in India and Ceylon by a wider spread of English education has not been possible among the low status groups in Malaya. It is not surprising that there has in recent times been a serious suggestion among young radical Indians to do away with all Tamil primary schools and convert them into national primary schools teaching mainly in English and Malay, with Tamil as one subject. In this way at least the door will be continuously open to a small gifted minority every year to escape from being condemned to life-long occupation as plantation labourers.

The English-educated Indians attained their maximum influence and prosperity in the 1950s and early 1960s. The expansion of administrative and commercial services after independence in 1957 opened a number of avenues of employment. Malayanization of executive positions increased these opportunities, and made possible fast promotions for gifted young men. Both in Malaysia and Singapore, Indians occupy positions in the higher echelons of public service in far greater proportion to their population. There are heavy concentrations in professions that Indians have specially taken to, such as medicine, law, engineering, and teaching. Standards of living and levels of affluence of the educated have vastly improved. Yet some aspects of their present position are the cause of concern. Their education and their ways of life have alienated them from their traditional cultural heritage, to which they are now, by and large, complete strangers. They are growing up, particularly those at school, as a rootless generation. In a country still divided into its distinct cultural traditions, a group that alienates itself from what is its own will have no cultural home.

VIII | Integration and the Future

Among minority communities in South-east Asia, Indians have been a difficult community to integrate. Wherever they have gone, they have maintained themselves aloof for decades, though never experiencing difficulties in their relations with other communities. Also noteworthy is the persistence of their attachment to their mother country, and the fascinating ways in which this shows itself. They follow closely domestic Indian events, political and other, and express their reactions vocally and expect to be heard. This makes their loyalty suspect in those countries where national attitudes and identity are just beginning to develop.

Yet in any analysis of Indian attitudes in contemporary Malaysia and Singapore, it would be an error to talk of them collectively and assume that a single set of Indian attitudes can be identified. One thing that can be said with confidence is that the Indian orientation has disappeared among a vast majority of these people. It persists only among the most elderly Indians, and this too in the form of a nostalgia for the village or town of their birth, and an emotional attachment to close relatives in the family whom they have left behind. Neither of these factors operates in the great majority of locally-born Indians. Even those who have close relatives in India have probably never seen them and the ties are not felt. There is now hardly any attempt to repatriate to India by those who have lived here long and have qualified for citizenship. This is partly on account of the relative prosperity Malaysia enjoys and the economic hardships that India has encountered in the past few years. These economic realities kill any nostalgia even among the older people. Indians as a community were most vocal in

their loyalty to Malaysia when it was threatened by Indonesia in 1964.

Though the physical yearning for, and political orientation to India has ceased, the tendency to look to India for their cultural and religious inspiration continues. This is decried by those both within the Indian community and outside it who would interpret this as continuing evidence of an Indian orientation. Such critics are banging their heads against a solid wall, because at present a solid core of the community desires to retain its traditional religious and cultural roots. These it is unable to fertilize in Malaysian soil in the absence of a sound and original tradition of creativity in Indian religion and culture. What is available in this country is generally but a pale imitation of the original and people will not always be satisfied with this. This is true of all aspects of culture. Whenever top-ranking artists, public speakers of repute, or known religious expositors from India tour the country (as they do quite frequently) they draw vast crowds wherever they go. People pay large sums of money to be able to appreciate what they offer, showing an abiding and fundamental interest in the higher culture of India. Critics who pride themselves on their Malaysian orientation point an accusing finger at these people, as if it was self-evidently an act disloyal to the country.

There is another new trend that has now begun and is increasingly becoming popular, particularly among that section of the intelligentsia that has moved upwards from lower social origins. By no means westernized like those drawn from the middle and upper classes, they feel that Indians in Malaysia must retain aspects of their traditional culture and thereby make a contribution to the country's cultural life. Yet they feel that Indian culture could be reinterpreted in the light of its local environment, and not absorbed wholesale from its homeland. The task of reinterpretation will not be made easy if Indians continue to import the transmitters of culture from India. Even at the cost of a decline in standards of achievement, which they readily admit would follow for some time, they feel that this naturalization of Indian culture should be consciously

promoted. One sees this movement afoot in the fine arts, in literature, and even in religion. This intelligentsia, which is bilingual, knowledgeable in both English and Tamil, is in a good position to bring this about. It is a challenging conception and reminds us of the indigenization of Indian culture in South-east Asia in the first millenium A.D.

If this is successfully brought about, and Indian cultural traditions are firmly and creatively planted on Malaysian soil, it would help greatly in the integration of the Indian community. It would make them less suspect to other communities, who need no longer be worried at Indians turning their eyes towards India. In fact it would be in the interests of indigenous nationalists, rightfully jealous of the extra-territorial ties of nationals, to hasten such a process. It would be beneficial to Indians themselves, who would be in harmony with their environment. It would give an outlet for creative self-expression, and foster a mature outlook. Above all, it would serve to bridge the gulf between classes. Tamil being the common Indian language of expression, if recognized as the language of creative art it could bring the educated elite and the masses closer and help the former to educate the latter. At the moment, no seepage of ideas takes place downwards within the community. The English-educated stand aloof, leaving the masses to look to India for the sources of their cultural enjoyment.

There are some aspects in which the Indian communities of Malaysia and Singapore differ in their contemporary position in the body politic. In Malaysia, communalism has been politically and socially accepted, and communities encouraged to think of themselves as entities. In Singapore, the whole direction of educational policy and political evolution has been such as to blunt the edge of communal consciousness. Communities here are only cultural entities. They do not, and cannot, derive political or economic benefits from a separate identification. Leaders do not appeal for communal unity, and indeed such appeals are politically unfashionable. Consequently, Indians have tended to integrate more with other communities politically, economically, and, to a less extent, socially. In Malaysia the

integrative tendency is hindered rather than helped by the communal approach.

Yet in both countries, particularly among the younger generation, there is a feeling that Indians should lose their identity completely and merge in a Malaysian or Singaporean nationality. This feeling has a long history, beginning from the 1920s among children of English-educated parents who were westernized in their social life. It did not expand beyond the confines of that class and hence even today is a minority sentiment, though highly articulated because of the literacy and leadership of this group. Inter-racial marriage alliances are mostly seen in this group, though perhaps not as much as one might have expected. Their social clubs and other activities are multi-racial, and they would consciously shun any identification with communal organizations. They have more political influence in Singapore than in Malaysia. In the latter country the communal character of politics leaves no room for people with such attitudes.

The one difficulty they face is that as yet a Malaysian or Singaporean national consciousness, with its own supra-culture above the separate cultural traditions of its constituent communities, has not come into existence. Though they have successfully repudiated their own traditional culture, they have not found anything to replace it. Some are thoroughly westernized, and have tested and worn the mantle of western culture. Many are cultural mongrels, neither Eastern nor Western. In Malaysia their position is further complicated by the forceful assertion of Malay language and Malay culture, and a veiled view that identifies this as Malaysian culture. The general movement against English and its primacy in education and administration tells against their interests.

The relative prosperity of Indians in both countries, as contrasted with the travails of their kinsmen in India, produces a general feeling of smugness and self-satisfaction at having done well. Yet this smugness hides a feeling of unease which the more thoughful ones cautiously express. The unease is related to the travails of minorities in many neighbouring countries. It was noted that a far closer

integration of Indians in Burma did not prevent violent reactions and mass repatriation in 1964. Chinese settled for decades and even centuries in Indonesia have been similarly treated. What are the guarantees for security in the Malay peninsula? At the moment such fears seem alarmist and ill-founded. There has been no popular movement against Indians in Malaysia or Singapore. They have been unaffected by the few instances of communal violence. Unlike the Indians in Burma and the Chinese in Indonesia, they do not conflict with the interests of either the Malays or the Chinese on any substantial economic or social issues. Yet the fears are there and sometimes expressed. It is a fear for the course of future developments which are as yet unknown and unforseeable. It is a fear of indigenous extremism which might react violently against minority communities. It is also a fear based on insecurity from external aggression.

A more serious fear for the future that is expressed relates to the economic prospects of the community, expecially in Malaysia, where these are considered in communal terms. It is pointed out that all classes of the community are affected by developing trends. The middle class which filled the professional and administrative services has been adversely affected since independence by the constitutional policy of Malay preferment. Government service opportunities are drastically curtailed. Opportunities for education will decrease with the faster progress of the Malay community which is catching up on years of neglect. Those who are already in employment show frustration at the delay in advancement. The Indians' position as a professional elite is being threatened. It is pointed out that if this happens the Indians will have nothing to fall back upon. They have no independent economic activities, unlike the Chinese, to absorb those rejected for Government employment. The Indian proletariat is also affected by the threat to the rubber industry. Government departments and municipal services increasingly employ Malay labour. Private industry, largely Chinese, prefers Chinese labour. In all avenues, Indians are feeling the effects of having grown as a community dependent on employment of particular types. They have not been

able to diversify their economic base. They do not have the means to do so now.

The story of this most recent phase of Indian contact with Malaya has been one of diversity and change. Many decades of labour immigration saw some moderate economic well-being, but also much social and psychological misery. The relative prosperity was earned at the expense of much hard work and suffering. During these years the Indian contributed greatly to lay the foundations of the country's economic structure and its community services. The plantation industry, Government developmental services, and municipal welfare services all made use of Indians at various grades. After the war Indians began to reap the rewards of their services. They shared in the country's prosperity and were particularly fortunate in the expansion of those sectors of the economy where they were concentrated. The 1950s may be said to have seen the highest level of Indian prosperity and influence. The 1960s brought their difficulties, shared by all classes of Indians. These difficulties have to be solved within the context of a nation-conscious Malaysia and Singapore. They are a challenge that Indians face and must solve in the years to come.

List of Abbreviations

C.I.A.M.	Central Indian Association of Malaya
F.M.S.	Federated Malay States
G.L.U.	General Labour Union
I.L.O.	International Labour Organisation
I.M.P.	Independence of Malaya Party
I.N.A.	Indian National Army
M.C.A.	Malayan Chinese Association
M.C.P.	Malayan Communist Party
M.I.C.	Malayan Indian Congress
M.P.I.E.A.	Malayan Planting Industries Employers' Association
N.U.P.W.	National Union of Plantation Workers
P.A.M.	Planters' Association of Malaya
P.W.U.M.	Plantation Workers' Union of Malaya
S.S.	Straits Settlements
T.R.A.	Tamil Reform Association

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